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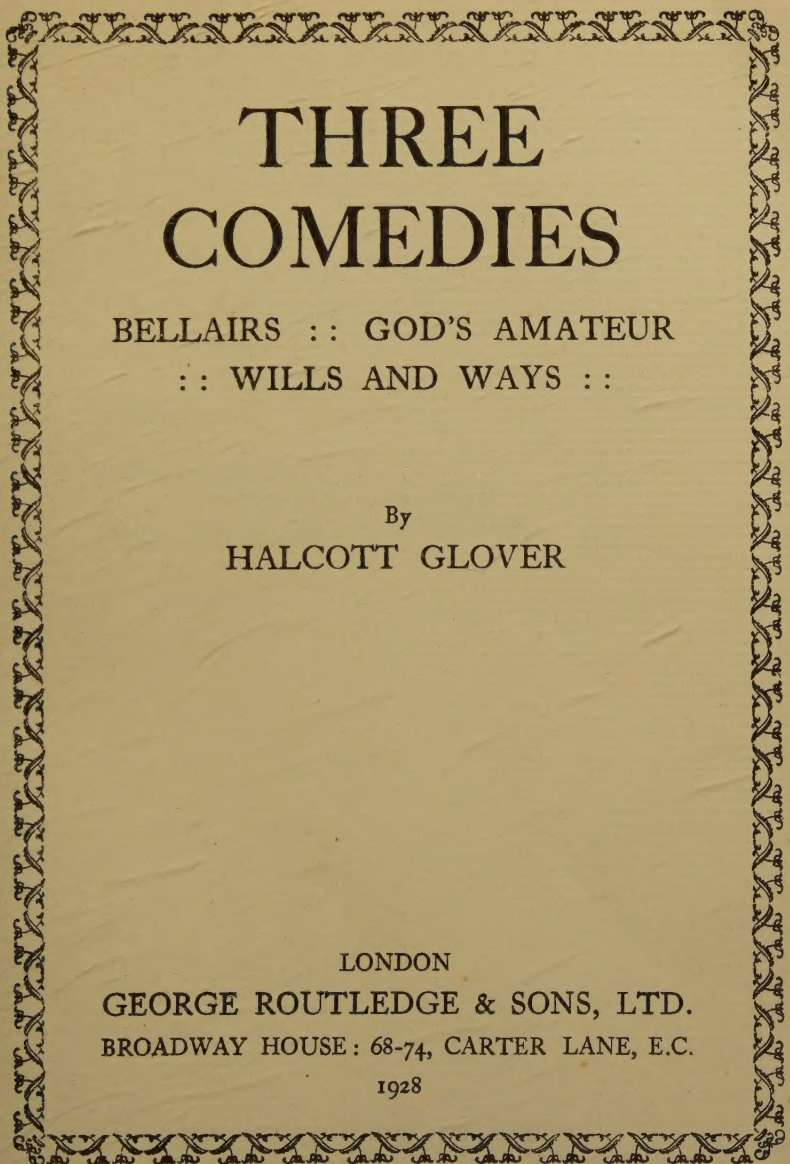
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16.

THREE COMEDIES

By the same Author

WAT TYLER AND OTHER PLAYS
THE SECOND ROUND



THREE COMEDIES

BELLAIRS :: GOD'S AMATEUR
:: WILLS AND WAYS ::

By
HALCOTT GLOVER

LONDON
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BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS

Characters, in the order of their appearance :

BETTY BARCLAY
BARCLAY
DOROTHY BELLAIRS
MATTHEW BELLAIRS
GIOVANNI LANZA
DIANA MARTIN
MORTIMER SCROPE
MATILDA BELLAIRS

Scenes : Acts One and Two, a Garden
Act Three, a Studio

Subject : the Humours of Character. An elderly painter, long separated from his family, and wedded to his habits, receives a series of assaults upon his peace of mind ; wherein appear certain passages of an irregular nature, a late-found affection for his daughter, his dread of his wife, and his sentimental relations with one Diana, an old friend ; with other matters of no consequence whatever.

ACT ONE

The garden of Paradise Studios, London, late evening of a summer day : a secluded nook, shaded by trees. The studios, two in number, occupy the back of the scene—light structures of lath and plaster, each with door and window and north light. The garden is closed on the right by a high wall, partly covered with ivy ; there is a fountain in the centre of the wall, and a bowl below for goldfish. Entrance to the garden is on the left, through an old brick archway with iron gates, and a bronze lamp above, fitted with electric light.

BELLAIRS

The gates stand open, admitting from a passage presumed to be some seven or eight yards in length, the street being at the far end. An easel stands over to the right, with a canvas still upon it ; a vacant stool behind the easel, and a small table covered with a painter's litter. Old garden chairs and a weathered table in the centre suggest that the garden affords in summer a kind of living room to the occupants of the studios ; and on the rise of the curtain a pretty girl of the working class is laying the table from a tray with materials for a simple meal for one. To her enters through the gate, a stout, red-faced man in shirt sleeves, carrying a bottle of wine.

THE GIRL : Hallo, father. Just ready, and going to call Mr. Bellairs out. You've thought better of it, I see.

THE MAN : Dang him, yes (*going to put down the bottle on the table*). But this will be the last until I see the colour of his money.

THE GIRL : Don't you worry. You've always been paid before. And you'll be paid again. Give him time.

THE MAN : And mind what you're about with him, my girl ! (*taking a corkscrew from his pocket and drawing the cork*). Give him time, eh ? Time to see you get into a mess one of these days. You're about the premises a great deal too much for my liking.

THE GIRL : You mind your business, and I'll mind mine.

THE MAN : That's how you talk, is it ? Don't let me hear of any dirty business between the two of you—that's all !

THE GIRL : Don't lose any hair over that—you won't hear.

THE MAN : Not much hair to lose (*chuckling as he passes a hand over his head*). Like Mr. Bellairs, there. What does a girl of your age want with a man like him ? Not that I'm saying anything against him ; he's a gentleman, if a rum 'un ; and what can you expect of these artists ? It's the temperament, that's what it is. But mind what I've been saying to you ! (*putting the bottle on the table, with the cork replaced*).

THE GIRL : Right-oh, father. You get back to your bar ; I'll be along in a minute.

BELLAIRS

THE MAN : And listen here, Betty, I've had about enough of lending him money. It's not much, and I've always got it back in the end—with a bit over, maybe. But he'll go down proper, one of these days. Something on account, if there's not to be trouble.

BETTY : Why don't you tell him so ?

THE MAN : Why, so I've meant to (*scratching his head*) ; but when he's there in front of you, it's not so easy. That's where you might come in ; find out how he stands. See what I mean ?

BETTY : He's broke, if you want to know.

THE MAN : There ! What did I tell you ? If I hadn't drawn the cork I'd take back that bottle. Well, it's the last ; and don't you forget it. Come along now, if you've finished. I don't mind what you do in the mornings, but I want you when my bar's open.

BETTY : Half a mo' (*going with a water jug to the fountain*).

THE MAN : Not much of that *he* drinks—unless it's with unsweetened. You look sharp, then. They'll be missing me yonder.

[He turns to the gate and departs. BETTY, returning to the table with the water jug, is putting finishing touches when a pretty girl of very different class comes through the gate and stands looking round, curious but hesitating.]

BETTY (*looking up sharply*) : What do you want ?

THE NEWCOMER : I want to see Mr. Bellairs. A man I passed in the passage said I should find him at number two.

BETTY : That's it, there (*pointing to the studio on our right*). Is he expecting you ? (*looking at the visitor in suspicion*).

THE VISITOR : No.

BETTY : You'd better wait a minute ; he's changing his clothes.

THE VISITOR : Oh ! (*disappointed*). Is he going out ?

BETTY : Not that I know of. Not till he's had his supper, anyhow. He's been painting all day (*pointing to the easel*), and has gone in to clean up.

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THE VISITOR : I'll wait—(*glancing at the table*). Will he be alone ?

BETTY : Not if you're here, he won't. There'll be nobody else, if that's what you mean.

THE VISITOR : That's just what I want—(*with satisfaction*).

BETTY : Meaning, Hop it ?

THE VISITOR : I beg your pardon ?

BETTY : Don't mind me. Perhaps you'll take a chair ? (*in heavy sarcasm*). Make yourself at home.

THE VISITOR : Yes, I think I will (*sitting, amused*).

BETTY : Nothing I can do ?

THE VISITOR : No thank you.

BETTY : Well—I was just going to knock 'on Mr. Bellairs' door, to let him know his supper's ready. Shall I announce you ?

THE VISITOR : Please don't. I'd rather surprise him.

BETTY : You don't want to tell *me* who you are ? (*looking back on her way to the door*).

THE VISITOR : Not at all.

BETTY : Very well, then (*she knocks on the door and returns*). I suppose *he* will know you when he sees you.

THE VISITOR : I don't think he will.

BETTY : You know *him*, it seems ?

THE VISITOR : I can't say that I do.

BETTY : Ump !—(*her curiosity baffled*). Then all I can do is love you and leave you, as the saying is.

THE VISITOR : If you please.

[BETTY tosses her head, and looking back suspiciously, follows her father. THE VISITOR, left alone, gets up excitedly ; goes softly to the easel and looks at the canvas ; passes the door of number two studio as though she would like to go in ; tiptoes to the door of number one to read a name card tacked upon it ; returns to the table, looks at the food prepared, sits down again. A moment later, the door of number two opens, and BELLAIRS,

BELLAIRS

a stoutish, middle-aged man with eye-glasses hanging from a narrow black ribbon, neatly dressed in conventional clothes, comes out. He stops abruptly on seeing his visitor, looks at her a moment quizzically, then advances—she rising to face him.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! (*with a little splutter of a laugh*). If I expected to find anybody here, it was someone very different. I shall be charmed to make your acquaintance, but who are you and where the deuce have you come from ?

THE VISITOR (*looking at him closely*) : Yes—it must be you !

BELLAIRS : It is indeed. While it is plainly you too, that doesn't help me very much.

THE VISITOR : You are Mr. Matthew Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : I am (*bowing*), and very much at your service.

THE VISITOR : You don't mind my looking at you a little ?

BELLAIRS : Delighted. Not so young as I was, but like a good vintage I improve with age. Cobwebs on the bottle perhaps—(*passing a hand over his head*). Take your time, but when you have looked enough—

THE VISITOR : I can just remember you.

BELLAIRS : Disgraceful that I cannot remember you. Was it very long ago ?

THE VISITOR : I was three years old.

BELLAIRS : Ah, then you will have changed more than I have. Unless you will help me out, you must remain a mystery.

THE VISITOR : Yes ! (*clapping her hands*) ; that will be best.

BELLAIRS : I mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth. I was just going to sit down to my frugal supper. Are you on the right side of food, or shall I see what I can do— ?

THE VISITOR : I've had dinner. May I sit and talk to you ?

BELLAIRS : Nothing could please me more. Pardon first a professional curiosity. Do I owe this visit to a deserved but reluctant fame ?

THE VISITOR : No. It's just me and you.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : But for your manifest innocence I should grow a little weak about the knees. Come then, let us sit down—just you and me. Hebe has contrived, I see, to produce a bottle of wine—

THE VISITOR : Hebe ?

BELLAIRS : A fanciful name for one very much not a daughter of the gods. You will join me at least in this ? (*touching the bottle*).

THE VISITOR : No thank you. But let me pour it out for you !

BELLAIRS : Half the pleasure in wine is through its associations (*pulling out the cork*). This brand, which can be none of the best, will be endeared to me by memories of you (*handing her the bottle and taking up a glass*). Then here, my dear Unknown (*when she has filled the glass*), is to that better world than this, in which beautiful young ladies appear out of nowhere, to disturb the hearts of men old enough to be their fathers (*not noticing as he drinks that she suppresses a catch in her breath*). Did you observe the name of this place as you came in ? (*laying down the glass*).

THE VISITOR : Paradise Studios ?

BELLAIRS : And never more worthily named than now (*placing a chair for her*). It's my custom in the summer months (*taking his seat at the table*), when all the ridiculous people in London are rushing about in trains and motor cars, to spend most of my time in this garden. My evenings I devote to quiet reflection, till the time comes for me to go to my natural refuge, the public house at the corner. Did you notice one as you came by ? (*helping himself to food*).

THE VISITOR : No. Yes I did, now you mention it.

BELLAIRS : The poor man's club—the best place in the world—the God-given resource of a lonely man.

THE VISITOR : Have you been very lonely ?—do you mind living alone ?

BELLAIRS : Heaven forbid that I should ever live otherwise—though the harsh fate Alone has been tempered with mercy. But that is not a subject for your ears. The man next door, when he's in town, is an ideal neighbour ; we exchange nods when we chance

BELLAIRS

to meet, and each of us minds his own business. And by the way (*laying down his knife and fork*), if it doesn't seem to question what needs no apology—what is your business with me ?

THE VISITOR : I came to ask your advice about something.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! What I can have said or done, that from the age of three—! I expect it isn't advice you want, but encouragement in something you know you oughtn't to do (*resuming his meal*).

THE VISITOR : Yes ! I felt sure you would understand. I want somebody to confide in ; and you, as a perfect stranger—

BELLAIRS : The stranger, for confidences, is always perfect ; and here he is, only waiting to be confided in. Go ahead without misgiving.

THE VISITOR (*looking down*) : I'm in love.

BELLAIRS : What a revelation ! Who could have thought it ?

THE VISITOR : Don't laugh at me.

BELLAIRS : In any unkind sense, it's the last thing I could do. So you are in love. A very proper condition to be in. It goes without saying that someone is in love with you ?

THE VISITOR : I'm afraid he is. If he wasn't—just yet—it would be easier.

BELLAIRS : Pooh—just yet ! When you know very well you haven't given him a dog's chance of being anything else. Don't you know that a man is a clean slate, on which women write Come on ?

THE VISITOR : Do they ?—is he, I mean ? Some of you must need a sponge now and then (*stealing a glance at him*).

BELLAIRS : I am glad to see that you have humour ; nothing very terrible can happen in such a case. We do, in fact, support the sponge industry ; though I wouldn't, in your presence, emphasise that point. (*He finishes his supper and rises*). If you will pour me out another glass of wine, I will sit beside you. Night is falling (*as she rises to fill his glass*), and while I shall soon (*looking at his watch*) be going to the place I have mentioned, you will be

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returning to your anxious parents. We must make the most of our time.

THE VISITOR : I am not going back (*as she hands him the refilled glass*).

BELLAIRS : You are not— ? (*pausing in the act of sitting*). Tch ! I had scarcely thought things had gone so far.

THE VISITOR : At least, not to-night.

BELLAIRS : And what, in the name of goodness, were you proposing to do to-night ?

THE VISITOR : I hoped you would let me stay here.

BELLAIRS : The deuce you did ! (*putting down the glass untasted*).

THE VISITOR : Mayn't I ? (*looking appealingly at him*).

BELLAIRS : You certainly may not. In talking of the merits of the stranger I never imagined such a consequence as this. Be off, and leave me to the enjoyment of a rational mind.

THE VISITOR : Very well (*moving away*). Then Giovanni will have to take me in.

BELLAIRS : My dear child (*following*) ; do wait a minute. You mustn't take my very natural surprise for want of sympathy. As far as that goes, I have the key to my neighbour's studio ; and rather than let you fly into the arms of someone called Giovanni—the very name fills me with concern—I will take you under my protection. Who the devil is Giovanni ! Some organ grinder ?

THE VISITOR : No ! (*laughing*). Though he is a musician ; and he *has* played in the streets as a boy.

BELLAIRS : This is dreadful. I don't know what sort of a mess I shall get into if I let you stay here, but you will get into a worse if I let you go. Fortunately, my reputation is a hopeless one already ; and if one more count against mine will help to save yours— ! But please be good enough to see me in the character of a stern moralist (*shaking a kindly fist at her*).

THE VISITOR : I can't. I know too much about you, Daddy.

BELLAIRS : Daddy ? If this is a familiar allusion to my few remaining hairs—

BELLAIRS

THE VISITOR : Don't you remember having a little girl once I'm Dorothy.

BELLAIRS : God bless my soul ! (*falling back*).

DOROTHY : So it will be all right for me to stay, you see.

BELLAIRS : Dorothy ! Mercy on us ! (*dropping into a chair*).

DOROTHY : Had you better drink this ? (*bringing him the wine*).

BELLAIRS : I had indeed—and the rest of the bottle too (*not drinking however, but looking at her*).

DOROTHY : I ought to have thought how it might upset you.

BELLAIRS : Springing it on me in this ruthless fashion ! Whether you are your mother's daughter, or your father's offspring, or an overpowering combination of both— ! (*he drains the glass and rises*).

DOROTHY : Feeling better now ? (*taking the glass*).

BELLAIRS : Better enough to ask what you mean by all this (*shaking a finger at her*). How did you know where to find me ? Why have you never been before ? And who, for goodness sake, is Giovanni ?

DOROTHY : Never mind Giovanni just yet. You see I have come to tell you about him before doing anything serious. That was right, wasn't it ?

BELLAIRS : Much more right than anything your father has done in his lifetime (*patting her cheek*). Will you kiss me, Dorothy ?

DOROTHY : Won't I ! (*giving him a hug*). I knew I should like you, and I do.

BELLAIRS : Many would say that I have been a parent to make the angels weep. I'm glad at least to have been able to make one of them smile.

DOROTHY : Isn't this fun ? (*clapping her hands*).

BELLAIRS : You have a staggering notion of fun, but that is perhaps the best spirit in which to get over it. What the younger generation is coming to ! In fact, there's not a pin to choose

BELLAIRS

between the younger and the older. The sins of the fathers (*dropping back into his chair*), to say nothing of the mothers!—You will be thinking me very unfeeling; how *is* your mother?

DOROTHY: She's quite well, I believe—(*sitting beside him*).

BELLAIRS: You believe?—don't you know?

DOROTHY: I haven't seen her for quite a long time. Didn't you know she lives in Italy?

BELLAIRS: I know she went there when we parted—dear, dear, it must be fifteen years ago!—and that she took you with her. And you are what my little Dorothy has grown into! Forgive my being a little exclamatory; I shall get used to you by and by.

DOROTHY: I *am* glad I came. I've been wanting to ever since I asked Miss Martin about you?

BELLAIRS: Miss Martin? (*sitting up*). Do you mean Diana Martin?

DOROTHY: Yes. When mother sent me to school in England I began going to Miss Martin in the holidays; and since I left school I've been living with her.

BELLAIRS: And I never heard of it! It's true my friendship with Diana suffered a break some years ago. It was the painful business of my wife's separation from me that made me first acquainted with Diana. She in fact negotiated it; with, if I may say so at this distance of time, tender consequences to herself. Diana! (*in amused retrospection*). What had she to say about me?

DOROTHY: She said you were a very wicked man, and I must never speak of you again.

BELLAIRS: And you have come to the wicked man for countenance in your own contemplated wickedness—is that it? (*his eyes twinkling*).

DOROTHY: Well, I couldn't go to Miss Martin about it . . . And besides, she's away from home.

BELLAIRS: So the cat being away—! Did she give you my address?

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : No. I wormed that out for myself. I'd always meant to come and see you—

BELLAIRS : A daughter to her father, as a son to his mother ! History repeats itself.

DOROTHY : Did you go to your mother ; did she help you ?

BELLAIRS : A more understanding woman never lived. Bless her ! She laid the foundations of all my later wisdom, and was happily my ruin !

DOROTHY : You see—we are both the same !

BELLAIRS : I must take very good care that we shall *not* be both the same. This is the second time you have led me into damaging admissions—when I am doing my best to be all that a parent should.

DOROTHY : Please don't. And it wouldn't take me in.

BELLAIRS : It would certainly be a relief to be just myself. After all, why should we visit on each other our unfortunate relation ?

DOROTHY : We won't. Let's go back to how we started.

BELLAIRS : If I could foresee how all this is going to end— !

DOROTHY : Tell me something, Daddy. How did you come to marry mother !

BELLAIRS : A question indeed : how does anyone come to marry anybody ? We fell in love, my dear, and made a bolt of it.

DOROTHY : Weren't you happy ?

BELLAIRS : Deliriously ; which perhaps accounts for what happened when we returned to a normal temperature. But your mother was a charming girl, and I was an ideal husband so long as her money lasted. When it was gone, she went too.

DOROTHY : How could she !

BELLAIRS : Very easily—especially with a little assistance from me. And from Diana : I must not be forgetting Diana.

DOROTHY : You mean— ?

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : No, no, no—nothing of the sort. Diana, always with more money than was good for her, came to the rescue—set up your mother in her excellent *pension* in Rome. So I was thrown upon the world ; and there descended on me the blessed peace which it has ever since been my care to maintain.

DOROTHY : Didn't Miss Martin do anything for you ?

BELLAIRS : Nothing to what I did for her : occupied her mind for several years—gave her something to live for—broke her heart, as she expressed it. Was this Giovanni you tell me of a *protégé* of hers ?

DOROTHY : I suppose he was, in a way. She used to have him play at her house. That's how I got to know him.

BELLAIRS : Always a weak spot in her heart for worthless men. Dear Diana ! What we have both been saved from !

DOROTHY : When she saw that we—Giovanni and I—

BELLAIRS : She threw him out ? (*laughing as he recalls a similar experience*).

DOROTHY (*nodding*) : And that's why we had to meet—oh, in all sorts of amusing places. You don't know, Daddy !

BELLAIRS : Diana knew nothing about these meetings, I'll be bound ?

DOROTHY : Why, naturally she didn't. Now ! When mother landed in England three days ago—

BELLAIRS : What ? Matilda in London ?

DOROTHY : No, she went straight on to York, and Miss Martin went with her.

BELLAIRS : You gave me what the vulgar call a turn. I've always taken comfort from the thought that England is an Island. A false security, but we sleep the sounder for the Channel's flowing between.

DOROTHY : Why, was mother so awful ?

BELLAIRS : Not at all ; if she had been, I should have had no reason to fear a reconciliation. But why to York, of all places ? Bless my soul ! Wasn't it there that her father the Canon— ?

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY (*nodding*): Grandfather. He's been taken suddenly ill, and mother was wired for.

BELLAIRS: And you've taken the opportunity of this family crisis—

DOROTHY: No, that's only as it happened. But Miss Martin being away, I've been able to see more of Giovanni than I had been doing lately. And so it's all come about.

BELLAIRS: And we arrive at what you wanted me for. I hope you will make allowance for my age and position towards you. I will assert my authority as little as possible—the more as I strongly suspect I haven't any . . . What the dickens is this? (*as there comes from the passage the sound of a lively Italian air, whistled with lilt and expression*).

DOROTHY: Oh, this will be Giovanni (*jumping up*).

BELLAIRS: The organ grinder! (*rising hastily*).

DOROTHY: Don't be so silly (*laughing*). He's a violinist. I told him to come for me in half an hour, and to whistle as he came along. Come on, Giovanni (*going to the gate*); everything's all right.

BELLAIRS: Tch! Everything's all wrong. If you had warned me of what was coming—

[GIOVANNI appears in the gateway, and DOROTHY, taking his arm, leads him to BELLAIRS. He is a dark, good-looking young man, dressed in baggy grey trousers, held by a belt, with grey shirt and black tie; no waistcoat, and a jacket worn unbuttoned. He has a rucksack slung over one shoulder, and a shapeless black hat crushed in his hand. At first glance, rather a tough customer, with lines of hardship and bitter experience graven early in his face. He is loose and free in his movements, with something of native gesture; but as will be evident when he speaks, born in London, though he affects an occasional Italian expletive. Some original breeding manifest, but roughened and defensive.

DOROTHY: My father, Giovanni.

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI : How do you do, sir ? (*making a guarded bow*).

BELLAIRS : I am charmed to make your acquaintance ; though if you were at the bottom of the sea my repose would be less endangered.

DOROTHY : You must be good to him, Daddy ; it was Giovanni who made me come to you.

BELLAIRS : Certainly, the best of recommendations. Am I to be content with Giovanni, or has he another name ?

GIOVANNI : Lanza.

DOROTHY : But call him Giovanni.

BELLAIRS : Well, my dear Giovanni, between you you seem to have been going it. This little scapegrace of mine has rather taken the ground from under my feet, but you will find me still capable of a move or two (*shaking a friendly fist at him*). Incidentally, why a rucksack ?

DOROTHY : Oh, that's mine ; he's been taking care of it for me while I was with you. Put it down, Giovanni ; I'm staying the night.

BELLAIRS : Luggage and porter all provided ! (*as GIOVANNI slips the rucksack from his shoulder and lays it on a chair*). And what do you suppose I am to say to you both, now you are before me ?

GIOVANNI : Will you hear me first, Mr. Bellairs ?

BELLAIRS : If what I am to hear is anything like what I have heard already— ! But sit down, one on each side of me : and I will act the part of judge (*taking a chair in the middle*).

DOROTHY : Giovanni says—

GIOVANNI : Dorothy says—

(*drawing up chairs*).

BELLAIRS : One at a time, one at a time ! Now, Dorothy— (*when they are seated*) ; Giovanni says— ?

DOROTHY : He says I mustn't, and I don't see why I shouldn't.

GIOVANNI : *Pazienza* ! It isn't that I don't want her to—

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Patience indeed ! If I am to spend any more time upon you, you must come to the point. *What* is it you mustn't, Dorothy ! I am perfectly sure you shouldn't, but let us know where we are.

DOROTHY : He was starting off this evening, to begin a walk through Sussex tomorrow. We'd arranged earlier in the day that I was to see him off at the station. But I'd been thinking things over, and said at the station that I was going with him. That's why there's a rucksack. It was to be a pleasant surprise for him. And Giovanni said he wouldn't let me go !

GIOVANNI : If you will let me speak, Mr. Bellairs—

BELLAIRS : I will indeed let you speak, seeing that you appear to be a more sensible man than I expected. Stuff and nonsense, Dorothy ; of course you can't go with him.

DOROTHY : I can ! You don't know anything at all about it yet. I agreed to our putting it off till tomorrow, but I told him I wouldn't go home. Then he suggested my coming to you, and went home to leave his own sack and his violin, while I broke the ice with you. I want you to tell him he's got to take me.

GIOVANNI : And so I would take you, if I didn't want—

BELLAIRS : She wants, you want—will you both be quiet ! What *I* want is a little more light upon all that has led up to this. What have you been doing with each other, in all these meetings I have heard of ?

DOROTHY : It was all new to me, what I saw with Giovanni. I've always been shut in, before. All the fun and danger there was, just round the corner ! Oh, I wish I'd been born a working girl, and nobody cared what became of me !

GIOVANNI : I took her to see what it was like, Mr. Bellairs—life with the lid off. She wanted to come and share it with me. I said she mustn't think of it. The more I showed her, the more she wanted to . . . the blessed area railings (*bitterly*), and the landlady coming in with a jug !

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : But you know you wanted it just as much as I did, Giovanni ! Enough for two, in a back room. I'd have married you any day, from when we began going about together.

GIOVANNI : *Madonna !*—And didn't I wish you might ? And don't I mean you to, as soon as I can keep you like a lady ?

DOROTHY : And when will that be ? I don't want to be a lady ; I'm tired of being a lady. I want to be wherever you are, and share it all with you—pick up the pennies in the street while you play, if it comes to that again.

GIOVANNI : You don't know what you're talking about. Because I can laugh and make the best of things ; because we've eaten macaroni together up back streets, and the sun was shining ; and because you've seen me play for fun to a barrel organ, with the kids dancing round ; and because I've let myself go a bit with you, forgetting all the dirty riff-raff of Kilburn and the Harrow Road, you think it's a life you could put up with. *Sacramento !* I know different.

DOROTHY : Well, Sussex isn't the Harrow Road. You might let me have *that* with you. You going away, and leaving me behind—

GIOVANNI : I never thought of going away ; it's you who put me on to that—made me promise I'd have a holiday—

DOROTHY : Because I meant all the time to come with you ! Haven't you always told me how nice girls wouldn't have anything to do with you, because you were poor ? I don't mind your being poor, and I was going to show you there was one girl who'd be good to you, and trust you, and go with you wherever you went. Oh, and I thought of our walking over the Downs together, stopping at inns, and you playing to people in the evening, as you've told me you do ; and of our lying out in the woods, with a hunk of bread and a bottle of wine, as you've so often done : breathing the warm air, and listening to the birds—

GIOVANNI : Blessed birds, and you one of them !

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : Don't you want it, Giovanni : don't you want it, even more than I do ?

GIOVANNI : Saints and angels come down to earth !—all the heavenly hosts singing in my head !—*Paradiso*, through a broken window !

DOROTHY : Then say you'll do it ! We'll start in the morning. Daddy says we may ; don't believe him when he says no !

BELLAIRS : Tch ! If I may break in upon this idyllic innocence—

DOROTHY : We can go by separate trains—just meet on the road. We can stay at different places—needn't know where each other sleeps. Only don't make me go home. I *won't* go home !

GIOVANNI : Lucky for me you're at home here (*rising and backing*). Do you think I'm the man to pass it by, when love comes offering with both hands ?

DOROTHY : Take them, then (*crossing to him with hands out*). And when it's over, if you won't marry a girl who's—who's done that—I'll go back to Miss Martin—and bear it . . .

BELLAIRS : My dear children ! It is time for an older person to intervene. I am touched—I am damnably touched. Give me your hand, Giovanni. I can't hold out to you any hopes, but you are far from being the scoundrel we have most of us been in our time. Step over into the shade, and pull yourself together, while I try to deal with this only too manifest daughter of mine (*pushing him away*). What am I to do with you (*to Dorothy*) ; what the devil am I to do with you ?

DOROTHY : Turn me out, I suppose (*in flat reaction*).

BELLAIRS : Will you do one thing for me, if I promise to help you in every way I can ?

DOROTHY : What is it, Daddy ?

BELLAIRS : Give me your word that you will do nothing rash ; wait quietly here while I think over what is to be done—a distracted parent, torn between sympathy and duty !

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : All right ; I'll be good.

BELLAIRS : The first thing to be done in every crisis is to have a drink upon it. I am going to leave you, seeking composure where alone it is to be found. While I'm gone, cheer up Giovanni a little—with a proper regard, of course, to the proprieties.

DOROTHY (*smiling*) : Don't be afraid.

BELLAIRS : I'm going no farther than the corner ; I shall even be within call. Just let me get my hat (*he goes over for it into his studio*).

DOROTHY : Giovanni (*calling him softly*).

GIOVANNI : What's the use ? (*coming to her side*). If you won't wait for a decent marriage, it's a kick out for me.

DOROTHY : Who's going to kick you out ?

GIOVANNI : I am—myself. If it was anybody else, I could make a fight of it.

DOROTHY : What do you mean ?

GIOVANNI : It's all up with me. I won't have you go away with me—hell, I'm not going, anyhow !—and I won't marry you till I'm able to do it.

DOROTHY : You are very ready with your wont's.

GIOVANNI (*as BELLAIRS comes out with his hat*) : Mr. Bellairs, don't go !

BELLAIRS : Tch ! When I am giving you every chance—

GIOVANNI : I don't want one. I've got to get out of this. Tell Dorothy it's all over. I'll go and throw myself under a train.

BELLAIRS : If you'd done so before making all this disturbance, there'd have been some sense in it. Only ten seconds out of my sight, and a lovers' quarrel already ? Let me see a proper harmony when I come back (*making for the archway*).

GIOVANNI : I can't have her throwing herself away ; I can't have her ruined through me. And I don't mean to be ruined myself, either !

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS: Ah! I was going to say, as to Dorothy, that perhaps you'd better wait till you were allowed to. Charmed to have made your acquaintance, but business of the last importance—*(he goes off down the passage)*.

GIOVANNI: *Accidente!* *(through his teeth, watching BELLAIRS go)*.

DOROTHY: Come here, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI: Don't you understand, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Yes, I do. But we've got to fix it somehow. It'll be years if I leave it to you.

GIOVANNI: It wouldn't be days if I'd made anything like a start. I'd rather have it years than spoil everything to begin with. Dorothy!—Give me time!

DOROTHY: And I'm to be a nice girl and go back to Miss Martin, meeting the dreadful nice people who come there—with you fighting it out alone, and both of us wasting all the lovely time we could be having together . . . Don't ask me to. If you do again, I shall take up my sack and go off somewhere by myself—I don't know where and I don't care. You'll never see me again.

GIOVANNI: *Mamma mia!*—if I marry you as things are now, before the year's out we shall be cursing each other. You don't know what you're asking for, and you don't know what I'm like when things get over me. *Saccr-r-r!*—when I've cursed my own mother, and thrown the chairs about the room. With the rent owing, and twenty snotty children falling up and down the stairs; I've been through it, I tell you! And then to get out of it a bit—and meet you—and look forward to a decent life one day, with a family growing up! And to see you, if we start wrong, pulled down to what I've come out of; and me, to put food in your mouth, giving up being an artist—playing in a cinema—like enough, taking to drink—

DOROTHY: Oh, don't, don't! It wouldn't be like that. You've told me yourself—all the jolly side to it——

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI : Yes—when you're on the right side of it ! I can make the best of things when I've something to live for, and something to hope for ; but with the dish cloths hanging on a string, and a sticky baby's carriage in the passage—*Dio mio !*—I'll kill you before I let you in for all that.

DOROTHY : There wouldn't *be* a baby's carriage ; and I'd go out to work too ; and you'd get on with your music, as you're beginning to do now ; and we'd hold hands over it, and I wouldn't let you play in a cinema, and there wouldn't be any dish cloths on a string ; and you wouldn't throw chairs at me, and you wouldn't take to drink—and you are being more unkind than I ever imagined you could be.

GIOVANNI : One year, two years, and I'll play you another tune. It'll be money before I've done. Once we can start in a decent place, and I can see a proper living coming in—you'll know then ! I've done with the scallawag life, except for fun when you can escape from it. I'll play in the streets for you if you want me to, and you can pick up the coppers—*che spettacolo !*—but it will jolly well be when I have ten pounds in my pocket, and a clean bed to go home to. Dorothy !—it's you who have made me like this—another world opened out to me ! Don't weaken me on it, Dorothy !

DOROTHY : Then let me come with you tomorrow. Just when another world was opening out to *me !* How can I go back, and begin the old one all over again—like it would be to you, if you went back to the Harrow Road !

GIOVANNI : And when the night came on—me what I am !—do you think I could say good night to you like any curate, and go and say prayers ? Not on your life ! And then when I'd done you in, we'd come to hate the sight of each other. I've seen it, and what comes afterwards. That's what you're asking me to do with you.

DOROTHY : I'm not. You don't know what girls think of these things nowadays. You're old fashioned. You're spoiling everything ; it will never be the same again.

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI: Old fashioned?—Yes, old as the world; seeing things as they are, and not as you English do, just as you want them. Well, then—It's poverty and holy sterility for me . . . there's only a hole in the universe where the daylight ought to be. You'll be meeting some married fellow with a white collar, and I shall go back to solitary confinement in Balham. Give me six months—give me six weeks! I'll tear something out of somebody, or spit blood and die.

DOROTHY: All right. It's getting dark. If I'm to go away, I'd better go. No use staying here, and all for nothing. Give me my rucksack.

GIOVANNI: You're not going like this—?

DOROTHY: What else am I to do? I was going to show you what I could be like—brave and happy, and making you forget all the hardships you've been through. It's all broken to pieces. I wanted it, Giovanni (*stamping her foot*); everything I've ever wanted was in this, and ten times more. I was going to have it though all the world said I wasn't. And it's you—it's you—that won't let me.

GIOVANNI: It's all the pack of them, smelling and howling after us. Me? It's me that's going. Tell your father I've gone (*snatching up his hat*).

DOROTHY: Where are you going?

GIOVANNI: Anywhere—get drunk—pick up a loose girl—forget I ever knew you.

DOROTHY (*crying out*): Giovanni!

GIOVANNI: That's me, if I'm not to have a home and a wife to keep me straight. If I can't have you, let me go to hell as I was born to.

DOROTHY (*running after him*): You musn't—you shan't!

GIOVANNI: I thought I could pick a star out of the sky. A tallow candle in a cellar's more my mark. Orpheus, playing to the black beetles! Let me go.

DOROTHY: Oh, just as it's getting real—!

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI : Getting real ? (*turning upon her*). Has it been play up to now ?

DOROTHY : Why shouldn't there be play ? There might be, if you wouldn't be so tragic.

GIOVANNI : *Santa Inglese !*—I might have known—you're not awake yet—it's all games to you. And a precious fool I am, to take it as I do (*flinging down his hat*). *Basta !* Tap up the whole dam orchestra, and start the movement over again !

[BellaIRS *re-enters from the passage with a brisk step*.

BELLAIRS : Almost in darkness. Let us have a light on the subject (*touching a switch by the gate*). Long faces, when I expected to have to look for you in some sheltered corner ?

GIOVANNI : We've been having a row, Mr. BellaIRS.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! You'll have many more before you're done. Here is something to help us to an understanding (*producing a flat bottle from his pocket*). Just let me go in for glasses and water. Shall I bring a glass for you, Dorothy ?

DOROTHY : What is it ?

BELLAIRS : Unsweetened : what is popularly known as Mother's Ruin. It might more happily be called Father's Fortune. Excuse me for two seconds (*he goes into the studio, where light springs up*).

GIOVANNI : Not much help there.

DOROTHY : I don't know. If I could stay with him, while you try to get a regular engagement—I shouldn't mind waiting a little, if it were here. If only I don't have to go back : everything so flat and dull and humiliating, when I thought I was making a real beginning !

GIOVANNI : Never mind what I said just now—about getting drunk and making a fool of myself. Forget it ! (*standing by her*).

[BellaIRS *reappears with a small tray*.

BELLAIRS (*glancing at them*) : That looks better. Coming events, in the shape of a generous mixture, have cast their good will before them. I couldn't find a third clean glass, Dorothy (*putting the tray on the table*), so if you will put your lips to mine— ?

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : Of course I will.

BELLAIRS : For once in a way (*busy with the bottle and water jug*). Draw up chairs ; and when we have touched glasses, we will see what can be done about you. Here you are, Dorothy.

DOROTHY : Ugh ! Horrid ! (*banding the glass back hastily*).

BELLAIRS : My dear child !—you really should be more careful : you might have spilt it. You, Giovanni, if I am not mistaken, are well enough seasoned. Half and half ?

GIOVANNI : I don't mind if I do (*taking his glass*).

BELLAIRS : Pardon the objection—in all serious matters—from a man of your Latin origin, nothing so indefinite as I don't mind.

GIOVANNI : Here's how, then (*drinking*).

BELLAIRS : And very well done ; I hasten to follow your example.

DOROTHY : How can you ? Such a nasty taste !

BELLAIRS : It's not the taste, my dear, but the effect ; maturity, the reflecting mind, the sense of proportion. Let us take these considerations to heart (*as they sit down*), and we can face the world.

DOROTHY : Daddy ! How much money have you got ?

BELLAIRS : Tch ! I have no money at all. It is a subject that has long ceased to interest me. I am depending, at the present time, upon the magnanimity of my good friend Mr. Barclay, the publican at the corner. Tic, my sweet child—if you have come across that expression.

DOROTHY : Then how do you live ?

BELLAIRS : By the grace of God, who knows an admirable creation when he sees it. There is scriptural authority for the statement. Now and then I have a windfall, when that rare bird, the judicious buyer of pictures, comes my way. Why do you ask ?

DOROTHY : I was wondering if you'd let me live with you.

BELLAIRS : Let you live— ?

DOROTHY : If I can stay here, I'll give Giovanni another chance.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Give Giovanni— ? And what kind of a life are you proposing for me ! My dear young thing, you cannot dispose of a too amiable person in this fashion. I understand your wish to gain time ; and I know that at your age the briefest period of waiting looks like eternity—which accounts for your readiness to take on a life-time as though it were five minutes. Give Giovanni another chance by all means, but not at the expense of my peace and quiet!

DOROTHY : Then what are you going to do for us ?

BELLAIRS : Do ? Never do today what you can possibly put off till tomorrow ; do nothing at all, and a higher power will always save you a world of trouble. If, as it seems, everything turns on money, be patient for a few hours, and leave it to me.

DOROTHY : But I thought you said you hadn't any money ?

BELLAIRS : I said a very true word ; but when one speaks of money, one does not refer to any particular pair of pockets. We shall have to come down upon Diana (*comfortably*).

DOROTHY : On Miss Martin ? (*dismayed*).

GIOVANNI : Good night, Dorothy (*rising*).

DOROTHY : Sit down, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI : But don't you see ? (*looking at BELLAIRS*). He's only wanting to get rid of us.

DOROTHY : Sit *down* !

BELLAIRS (*as GIOVANNI obeys*) : This is how you are going to be made to sit up, my dear sir.

GIOVANNI : *Accide— !* (*under his breath*).

BELLAIRS : You couldn't wish me a worse accident than unmannerly company. If you go on like this I must certainly take steps to get rid of you. I have telephoned to Miss Martin's, Dorothy.

DOROTHY : You've given me away ?

BELLAIRS : I shall hope to do so one day in a sacred edifice. Meanwhile, if you will forgive the precaution, I have merely made sure that Diana really was away from home.

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : Oh . . . (*relieved*).

BELLAIRS : But they told me that a wire has come saying she is returning to town by a night train. So as we don't want her to be running to the police at six o'clock in the morning—

DOROTHY : What have you told them ?

BELLAIRS : Simply that nobody need be anxious about you ; you are spending the night with a friend.

GIOVANNI : What ? (*starting up*).

BELLAIRS : And what's the matter now with Giovanni ?

GIOVANNI : Why—Miss Martin may think that it's me !

BELLAIRS : Tch ! That never occurred to me ! I see that you're for it, Giovanni. Take warning by this little *contretemps*, and look more closely to your behaviour in future !

GIOVANNI : Where's my hat ? (*flinging away*).

DOROTHY : But what about it, Daddy ?

BELLAIRS : Obviously, as I can show that you've spent the night under my care, there's nothing to be afraid of. I'm getting tired of you both (*rising, and walking to his easel*). Take Giovanni into my studio, and say good night to him.

DOROTHY : But what's going to happen tomorrow ?

BELLAIRS : One thing that is going to happen (*as GIOVANNI approaches them*), is that Giovanni will come early and take you off my hands. You were going into the country, so for God's sake, go !

DOROTHY : There ! (*to GIOVANNI*). What did I tell you ?

GIOVANNI : *Pazianza* ! After all that's been said—

BELLAIRS : As if I should take any notice of all that's been said (*removing the canvas from the easel*). You'll get out of my sight, and behave yourselves ; and when you come back in the evening, perhaps I shall have news for you.

DOROTHY : Of course—be quiet, Giovanni!—if you can arrange to set us up—

BELLAIRS : I wish I knew how to set you down—in a neighbouring planet.

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI : Look here, Dorothy ! I don't want any setting up by Miss Martin, and having to kow-tow to her. I want to make my own way, and tell everybody to go to blazes.

BELLAIRS : You'll end yourself in some such locality, my dear sir, if you keep up this truculent tone. Why, bless my soul !—do you imagine that with such a wife you will be consulted ? If there is one thing certain, you will do as you are told. Begin now (*giving him the canvas*) ; take this in for me, and let me have a moment with Dorothy.

DOROTHY : Go in, Giovanni ; I'll follow you. (GIOVANNI *takes the canvas with an angry gesture, and goes into the studio*). Darling ! (*throwing her arms round BELLAIRS*). This has been a trying evening for you.

BELLAIRS : It has indeed ! But your affection, my dear child, is more than a consolation.

DOROTHY : You *will* try to do something for us ? Never mind Giovanni—I mean, his rough temper and things. He has a heart of gold, really.

BELLAIRS : If he had a pocket of gold it would be more to the purpose.

DOROTHY : He shall have a good talking-to, tomorrow.

BELLAIRS : Accept my blessing (*patting her shoulder as he embraces her*). Hallo ? (*as BETTY appears in the gateway*). What is the meaning of this ? (*putting DOROTHY away*).

BETTY : Oh, I just came to see what was going on.

BELLAIRS : The deuce you did. We shall have now the spectacle of someone going off—with a flea in her ear. Run away—I'm busy.

BETTY : So I thought you might be (*looking composedly at DOROTHY*).

DOROTHY : Who is she ? (*touching BELLAIRS' arm*).

BELLAIRS : Nobody for you to take any notice of. Go into the studio, and wait till I knock (*gently putting her away ; she goes into the studio, glancing back*). Now, Betty ! (*shaking a fist at her*). What have you to say for yourself ?

BELLAIRS

BETTY : Well, what have you ? I couldn't hear all you were saying when you were at the telephone. I've come to see.

BELLAIRS : This vulgar curiosity—when shall I break you of it ! Didn't I tell you to keep off ?

BETTY : Yes, and that's why. It's rather late for you to have a visitor.

BELLAIRS : So it is (*looking at his watch*). But she will make up for coming late by going early in the morning.

BETTY : In the morning ? (*advancing a step*).

BELLAIRS : And apropos ! Since you have come, you can make yourself useful. Take this key, and get out my neighbour's clean sheets.

BETTY : Oh ? (*stopping dead*).

BELLAIRS : You little fool, can't you see I am pulling your leg ?

BETTY : Oh, well—if she's going—

BELLAIRS : Who said she was going ? While you're about it, make up the bed, and see there's clean water and everything.

BETTY : She's going to be in there alone—with you next door ?

BELLAIRS : With me next door ! (*watching her with amusement*).

BETTY : You don't want to tell me anything about her, by any chance ?

BELLAIRS : I do not. And still less do I want her to be told anything about you.

BETTY : I might tell her a thing or two about you.

BELLAIRS : So you might, but you won't. You'll keep yourself discreetly invisible. Go in and shut the door (*leading her by the arm to number one studio*) and don't come out till the coast is clear.

BETTY : Here, hold on (*resisting*). I want to know a little more about this. You don't tell me—

BELLAIRS : What a lot of things I don't tell you ! Come to me at your usual time in the morning. You'll have to find me a clean collar, and brush my clothes. I'm going out before eleven.

BETTY : Right-oh, then. I'll find out all I want to know, trust me (*opening the studio door*).

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : And how I am trusting you ! (*patting her shoulder*).
Not without misgivings.

[*She shakes him off and goes in. He stands a moment as the lights go up, then goes to his own door and knocks. DOROTHY and GIOVANNI come out.*]

DOROTHY : Has she gone ?

BELLAIRS : Gone about her proper duties : my maid of all work, come to see if there was anything she could do. And so we part, Giovanni (*shaking his hand*). I am always about early ; walk straight into my studio in the morning.

GIOVANNI : Good night, Mr. Bellairs. I'm sorry to have disturbed you—

BELLAIRS : Never apologize—it only rubs in the injury. Put on your hat ; that's the best thing you can do for me.

GIOVANNI : Good night, Dorothy.

DOROTHY : Good night, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI : *A rivederci !* (*he waves his hat and departs through the gateway*).

BELLAIRS : Now come and sit with me indoors for half an hour, my dear. We have scarcely begun to know each other. Wait ! If there is any salvage to be picked up—(*taking the flat bottle and his glass from the table*).

DOROTHY : Can I bring these other things in ?

BELLAIRS : Leave them ; they'll be cleared away before you are up.

DOROTHY : Oh, my rucksack ! (*going for it*).

BELLAIRS : Yes ; better take that in with us.

[*They go into the studio. A moment passes, and then BETTY, with a water jug in her hand, looks cautiously out of the other studio door. Seeing the coast clear, she carries the jug to the fountain ; then creeps to the window of BELLAIRS' studio, and peeps in.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT TWO

A little before noon, the next day. A woman and a man enter from the gate—the woman about forty-five, well dressed and still good looking; the man about fifty, a parson of the more human sort: kind, rather diffident, in well-worn grey clothes, with only the collar to mark his calling. These are DIANA MARTIN and MORTIMER SCROPE.

DIANA: If you had only been at home, Mortimer, I could have explained everything before we came.

SCROPE: I'm very sorry, Diana. I was in not long after you'd telephoned, and took a taxi at once.

DIANA: Well, you're here; I was relieved to find you waiting. You'll have to pick up as we go along. All I want you to do is to support me in everything I say.

SCROPE: Can't you give me a hint or two before we knock? If Mr. Bellairs is always at work in the morning, we are not likely to be seen by him. It's very secluded here. Why not sit down for a moment on one of these chairs—?

DIANA: Perhaps I'd better. I shan't be sorry to collect myself a little. I was travelling all night, Mortimer, and don't feel at my best. How do I look?

SCROPE: Charming.

DIANA: So you say, and so I hope you feel. But you haven't known me so long as Mat has; he is sure to see a change.

SCROPE: I'm sure—I'm sure—

DIANA: That's what people say when they are sure of the contrary. It's very hot. Let me touch my temples with *Eau de Cologne*.

SCROPE: It's pleasantly shady here (*looking round*).

BELLAIRS

DIANA : Shady in more than one sense, I'm afraid (*busy with her handbag*). Mat has lived here now for—it must be ten years at least.

SCROPE : How long is it since you've seen him ?

DIANA : Five or six. I mean, since I was here last. He's been to see me, once or twice. I didn't encourage him.

SCROPE : But you were good friends once, weren't you ?

DIANA : You'd better know all about it. I was in love with him. Don't say again that you are sure !

SCROPE : I've known it for a long time, Diana. I think you are in love with him still. And why not ?

DIANA : Very much why not—from you. Please don't be broad-minded. I want you to frown on the whole thing.

SCROPE : I find it difficult (*smiling*).

DIANA : If I am going to marry you, Mortimer—which is far from certain—you will have to turn me into a reformed character. There—I feel cooler (*finished with her bag*). I'm not sorry for all that's been happening. It's to be a Big, Round, Full Stop.

SCROPE : As to Matthew Bellairs ?

DIANA : Who else should it be ! I'm going to be utterly ruthless. He's got to have his wife return to him.

SCROPE : My dear ! I didn't imagine—

DIANA : And now you know. I was instrumental, years ago, in her leaving him—with all that that brought upon myself. If I am to give up the idea of Mat—as I gave *him* up when he became more and more impossible—he's got to give up something himself. This preposterous life of his !—he'd have starved, if I hadn't bought pictures now and then in secret. And this that's happened about Matilda is going to clinch it !

SCROPE : Remember, Diana, that I am completely in the dark—

DIANA : That won't matter ; you will only have to back me up. So let's go to the door (*rising*) and get it over.

BELLAIRS

SCROPE : It sounds to me a rather delicate situation. A man and his wife . . . I should really prefer, if you don't mind, to know what I'm to back you up in—

DIANA : There isn't time. And besides, you mightn't want to. You're on trial, Mortimer ; you have to see me for once as I really am.

SCROPE (*unhappy*) : Well, I'll do my best . . .

DIANA : Oh, and there's another complication. That foolish daughter of his—I can't tell you now, or how I've heard about it—she came running to her father last night. She won't be here now, but you must insist on her coming home to me later in the day.

SCROPE : I must—? Surely Mr. Bellairs—

DIANA : You will take no notice whatever of anything Mat says. Now ! His studio is number two (*advancing resolutely to the door, followed by SCROPE in evident pain*).

SCROPE : Of course, Diana, I want to help you in every way I can.

DIANA : I hope you do. We shall see how you live up to your profession (*having knocked at the door*).

[*The studio door opens, revealing BETTY, bare footed, and wrapped in a flaming Chinese dressing gown*].

BETTY : Hallo ? (*a trifle disconcerted*). What do you want ?

DIANA : We are looking for Mr. Bellairs.

BETTY : He's out.

DIANA : And who—if I may ask—are you ?

BETTY : Well, I might ask you the same. I thought you were the man for the milk can.

DIANA : Do you—er—live here ?

BETTY : Not what you'd call live (*smiling affably*). But here I am.

DIANA : Only too evidently.

BETTY : Anything I can do ?

DIANA : Will Mr. Bellairs be back soon ?

BELLAIRS

BETTY : Not that I know of. He doesn't often go out, but when he does it may be all day.

DIANA : You seem to know his habits.

BETTY : What do *you* think ?

DIANA : I think I'll have a little talk with you. Mortimer !
(*turning from the door*).

SCROPE : My dear, Mr. Bellairs is an artist. This is his studio.

DIANA : No, this is another thing entirely. There wouldn't be a model here, with him out. Am I not right ? (*to BETTY*).

BETTY : Quite right (*laughing*). I come in to do for Mr. Bellairs. Get his breakfast, clean up—that sort of thing.

DIANA : In that costume ?

BETTY : Warm day, isn't it. I was just going to cool off with the goldfish.

DIANA : Indeed ?

BETTY : Oh, you're not overlooked here. The man next door's away—not that he matters.

SCROPE : I think, Diana—

DIANA : No, we won't go away. We seem (*turning to BETTY*) to have surprised some of the domestic arrangements here. Will you answer my question, as to who you are ?

BETTY : All the pleasure in life. I'm Betty Barclay ; I come from the public house at the corner, Miss Martin.

DIANA : You know me then ?

BETTY : There's a portrait of you inside. And your friend called you Diana.

DIANA : You know I am an old friend of Mr. Bellairs' ?

BETTY : Oh, yes (*in friendly familiarity*) ; he often talks about you.

DIANA : I can believe it ! This gentleman is Mr. Scrope ; I am a parishioner of his. I want to talk to this young woman alone, Mortimer.

SCROPE : Certainly (*anxious to escape*). I'll take a walk.—

BELLAIRS

DIANA : No, I shall want you at hand.

BETTY : Perhaps Mr. Scrope will sit in the garden. Come in, Miss Martin.

DIANA : That won't do, either. I can't have you meeting Mat, Mortimer, and being got round by him in my absence. May Mr. Scrope go into the studio, Miss—er—Barclay ?

BETTY : If he won't turn over my clothes (*doubtfully*).

DIANA : Tut, child ! Stand out of the door, and come with me (*taking BETTY's hand to draw her out*). I won't keep you long, Mortimer.

SCROPE : Anything you like, Diana (*he goes in*).

BETTY : That clears the ground, doesn't it !

DIANA : I suppose you are meaning to be agreeable. Well, I am trying to be the same. I'm going to sit down (*taking the nearest chair*). You may sit down too.

BETTY : I'll sit on the edge of the chair (*watching DIANA with humour as she sits*). That's the proper way for a fallen woman, isn't it ?

DIANA : I hope it's not so bad as that—er—Betty (*making up her mind to be conciliatory*). I am not going to be shocked.

BETTY : Not with him out of the way (*jerking her thumb towards the studio*).

DIANA : You are shrewd enough. I am going to speak plainly. We are two women, Betty.

BETTY (*nodding*) : And one man.

DIANA : You wish to imply— ? (*stiffening a little*).

BETTY : Well, you've known Mr. Bellairs for a long time, haven't you ? You'd have married him if you could.

DIANA : Has he told you that ?

BETTY : Often. It's one of his great jokes.

DIANA : Upon my word— !

BETTY : You said something about two women. I'm one of them, you know.

BELLAIRS

DIANA : Then you may have some reason to fear me.

BETTY : Tit for tat, Miss Martin.

DIANA : Not at all. You will not be even with me just yet. I can break you—oh, very easily !

BETTY : Rattle her bones over the stones, eh ?

DIANA : Not if I can help it. You might make a friend of me. How long has this been going on ?

BETTY : I was in service. I came home to help father when mother died. That's how I met Mr. Bellairs. What you call " this " has been going on a month or two. It's true I come in to do the place up—that's how it began. And that's all there is to it.

DIANA : Not love ?

BETTY : Why, if it came to love, I might want someone about my own age. He's a kind old thing, but he's a bit rocky, Mr. Bellairs. But *you* know.

DIANA : Do I ?

BETTY : Oh, you're a respectable lady, all right ; but you must know what it is when you're getting into years (*with a faint indication of putting her tongue out*).

DIANA : If you provoked me too much—I might take Mr. Bellairs away from you.

BETTY : You might try.

DIANA : Yes—I might try.

BETTY : And what's it for, if you can't have him yourself ?

DIANA : Really ! But if I am to allow myself to talk to you at all—it's for several things. To begin with, shall we say morality ?

BETTY : Talk about something that matters.

DIANA : Very well. Perhaps when you come to the age of which you have reminded me, you will find that morality matters a little. Does money matter ?

BETTY : You want to buy me off ? Go on ! (*contemptuously*).

BELLAIRS

DIANA : Not to you, but to Mr. Bellairs. To Mr. Bellairs, my dear !

BETTY : It can't matter much, seeing he's never had any.

DIANA : It might for that reason matter the more. Has he had many commissions lately ?

BETTY : No, poor dear. He's down at present to carrying little sketches in his pockets and selling them to men in the pub. for five shillings.

DIANA : I like you for standing up for him, but that is neither here nor there. Mr. Bellairs will throw you over without a moment's hesitation when it suits him.

BETTY : Well, that's only common sense. And when a man doesn't want you, you're better without him. You've found that out, Miss Martin.

DIANA : I've found out everything I wanted to know. And now something for *you* to know. Mr. Bellairs has a wife living—

BETTY : As if I didn't know that !

DIANA : You didn't hear me out. Mrs. Bellairs is coming back to live with him.

BETTY : Oh, Lord (*getting up*). Is this true ?

DIANA : You will see (*rising*). And now another thing. Does your father know about your adventures here ?

BETTY : He's never asked me . . . and you'd better not tell him (*in sudden suspicion*).

DIANA (*sweetly*) : Then that of course is the first thing for me to do.

BETTY : Oh, is it ? Forewarned is forearmed, Miss Martin. I'll be there first !

DIANA : Not in that costume, I think ?

BETTY : Crikety !—my clothes are in there !

DIANA : Take an older woman's advice, my dear : never be caught without your armour.

BETTY : No, best not—when there are dragons about. Let me pass.

BELLAIRS

DIANA : When I have called out Mr. Scrope. (*She goes to the studio door and pushes it open, calling*) : Mortimer.

[*BETTY runs round by the wall and into the studio ; SCROPE comes out, smoking a pipe.*

DIANA (*sitting down, laughing*) : What a limb of Satan ! I've quite lost my heart to her. She's charming, Mortimer .

SCROPE : And now hadn't we better come away, Diana ?

DIANA : Certainly not. I wish you wouldn't smoke. Mat smokes from morning till night.

SCROPE : I know I oughtn't to (*knocking the ashes out of his pipe*). I lighted this in the studio quite mechanically.

DIANA : I'm going through an emotional crisis. I must get Mat out of my system. Aren't you jealous of him ?

SCROPE : Somehow, my dear, I am not.

DIANA : Well, I'm jealous of Miss Betty Barclay. I'm only waiting for her to get dressed, and then I am going to march her straight to her father. You will come too, of course.

SCROPE : But Diana ! Consider, before we hurt this poor girl—

DIANA : Good gracious, who has said anything about hurting her ?

SCROPE : Oh (*relieved*), I thought you meant—

DIANA : I mean to separate her from Mat. That's got to be done in any case before Matilda arrives. Isn't it perfectly obvious ?

SCROPE (*giving it up*) : Well, my back is I hope broad enough, and my coat shabby enough—

DIANA : To excuse your want of principle ? If I am to marry you I shall insist on your dressing properly (*rising*). Why, look ! (*as BELLAIRS, walking briskly, comes through the gateway*).

BELLAIRS : Tch ! Diana herself ! I have been paying a most unwonted visit to your house, and here I find you. I thought it not impossible we might have crossed ; so stopping only for one or two drinks, I hastened back—

DIANA : You have not changed your way of life, I see.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : After spending fifty years learning how to live, should I be likely to change it ? I'm sorry you've been kept waiting out of doors. If I'd foreseen, I'd have left someone to receive you.

DIANA : You did.

BELLAIRS : You found Betty ? Then you found very good company. What did you make of her ? (*with a twinkle*).

DIANA : Do you think I would consent to talk with a woman like that ?

BELLAIRS : Talk ? Talk to anybody that's amusing. Give me social grounds for talking to this reverend gentleman.

DIANA : Mortimer Scrope. Matthew Bellairs, Mortimer.

BELLAIRS : I see you have not been able to escape terms of intimacy with this fascinating woman, my dear sir. I am charmed to make your acquaintance. I hope Diana has known how to behave herself, at least in your case ?

SCROPE : My dear Mr. Bellairs—

DIANA : Mr. Scrope is the Rector of St. Timothy's.

BELLAIRS : Ah yes ; since my time. I had the pleasure, Mr. Scrope, of knowing your predecessor. We did our best together to keep this difficult parishioner of yours in order. You are looking well, Diana. Never marry the woman you are in love with : nature made us for each other, but art knew where to draw the line. What have you done with Betty ?

DIANA : I sent her in to get dressed.

BELLAIRS : Dressed ? Was she disporting herself ? I hope Scrope had the decency to retire ?

DIANA : I conclude, Mat, that you are talking to gain time.

BELLAIRS : With all time before me ? It is my constant possession—the only possession that I value. And as if I had anything to hide from you ! Speaking of which, Dorothy spent the night here. It was to reassure you that I went to your house.

DIANA : I know all about that. We have come about something very different (*sitting down*).

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Tch ! If you know all about it, you take it very coolly. I argue the best from this as to my young friends. But by all means let them wait. Something very different ?—I don't know what indiscretion is on your lips, Diana, but Mr. Scrope is plainly unhappy in his mind. What has she been up to now, my dear sir ? (*as they take chairs*).

SCROPE : I assure you, Mr. Bellairs—

BELLAIRS : That you haven't the smallest idea ? I can well believe it. And Diana herself will scarcely know—till she repents of it.

DIANA : If you were a different sort of man, Mat—as I hoped you might have been by this time—

BELLAIRS : Hoped ?—With all your experience of me ? But go on.

DIANA : If you had been a different man, Mr. Scrope would have had no occasion to seek you out. As it is he is going to tell you one or two home truths.

BELLAIRS : Truth is truth, whether at home or abroad. I can see that you are in for it, Scrope (*putting up his eyeglasses*).

SCROPE : My dear Diana ! How can I possibly—

DIANA : Don't try to get out of it, Mortimer. You know that you have insisted upon our coming here together. You are to tell Mr. Bellairs, with all the authority of your sacred calling, just exactly where his duty lies.

BELLAIRS : I trust you are equal to it, my dear sir ?

SCROPE : I am equal at least to this, Mr. Bellairs, that I have a very sincere desire to support Miss Martin—

DIANA : Thank you, Mortimer.

SCROPE : And relying upon your good humour, I am going to take the liberty—

BELLAIRS : Pardon my interrupting you. From a man of your breeding—we must *not* take liberties.

SCROPE : I am going to take the privilege—of your manifest openness and sincerity—

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Tch ! Say no more !

SCROPE : Unhappily I have more to say.—The privilege of introducing for Miss Martin a subject—which believe me, of my own initiative—

BELLAIRS : You wouldn't mention for worlds ? Believe me in turn, my dear sir, that you have my sympathy. Let me help you. What is this subject you are to introduce ?

SCROPE : I feel a considerable delicacy in approaching it.

BELLAIRS : When people begin like that, something very indelicate is likely to follow. In consideration for your cloth—What the devil have you come for, Diana ?

DIANA : To tell you that you are to take back your wife.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! I have not invoked the devil idly. Such a brutal announcement as this ! It's an extraordinary thing about women, Scrope, that while they arouse in us the most sensitive feelings, they remain themselves so insensitive. To a man of your calling I must not pursue the subject—of how coarse women are in love, as they are materialistic in thought. And why am I to take back my wife, Diana ? Still more to the point, is she to take back her husband ? What is all this nonsense ?

DIANA : Before I tell you whether it is nonsense or not (*rising*), I am going to send home this young woman. I shall have a few words with her first, and then confront you with her.

BELLAIRS : I foresee, Scrope (*rising also*) that if Diana is going to bring out Betty, this will be no place for you. Our natural refuge as men—I mean the public house at the corner—

DIANA : Certainly not, Mortimer. I am not going to have Mat working upon you—

BELLAIRS : I'm sure Mr. Scrope is incapable as I am—

DIANA : Two men together in a public house are capable of anything ; they are in league against all the women in the world.

BELLAIRS : And very necessary for us, while women continue to be what they are. Come along, Scrope.

BELLAIRS

DIANA : Stay here, Mortimer, and prevent Mat from running away. You have failed me lamentably up to now ; try to redeem yourself in my eyes (*she goes into the studio*).

BELLAIRS : I don't know what dreadful implications lie in all this for you, my dear sir. And all this time I have not asked you to smoke ! (*producing cigarettes*). Without tobacco and drinks paradise itself would go nowadays unpeopled. We have improved on the old ideal.

SCROPE (*declining a cigarette*) : And paradise seems far away as ever.

BELLAIRS : How can you say so ! We have brought it down to earth. I live in paradise consistently ; you must have observed the name on the wall. It is a fool's paradise, if you will ; but what does that matter so long as we find it amusing. Every intelligent man comes eventually into some such position.

SCROPE : You would not admit, then, any obligations ?

BELLAIRS : But I assert the chief obligation of all—to let things alone. Busy people try to interfere in others' affairs, and look at the world they make of it. Shall we walk ?

SCROPE : I'm afraid not, Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : You show an admirable devotion ; of such is the Kingdom of heaven. If my place were my own, I'd take you in to see some of my pictures. You must come again, when there is no Diana to distract us. It's a pleasure to meet a man of your enlightenment (*as they resume their seats*).

SCROPE : No doubt you have a way of life that suits you ; it may even be necessary for the work you do—

BELLAIRS : Tch ! In speaking of enlightenment, I scarcely associated you with views so liberal. I shall have to look after you. I have few claims to any uprightness, but while I am of course an immoral person, I am moral in my immorality. Put unbounded confidence in me : I act for the best for all parties.

SCROPE (*smiling*) : You have your own interpretation of best.

BELLAIRS : What should I be doing with anyone else's ?

BELLAIRS

SCROPE : Meeting you in your own spirit, is it a sufficient return—

BELLAIRS : To society, you mean, that I shall merely exist and amuse myself ? I am perfectly willing to be an object of amusement, if that may go into the balance. You will allow me to take my work for granted, as the only thing of any importance. If you ask for some practical accomplishment, I meet a long-felt want ; I am a specialist in spending other people's money. I can lay it out for them economically, intelligently and sincerely. And there is not a human being I have met but is the richer in character and experience for having known me. You feel it yourself. Come, tell the truth.

SCROPE : There is nothing to be done with you ; I can testify to that.

BELLAIRS : Then these few moments have not been passed in vain (*rising as DIANA comes out, followed by BETTY in her ordinary clothes*). Mr. Scrope has just been telling me, Diana, that I am a hopeless case. You have been closeted with one even more so. I hope you have realised it by this time.

DIANA (*talking to BETTY and at BELLAIRS*) : Now you quite understand me, Miss Barclay ? Mr. Bellairs will have no further need of your services. Be a good girl, and do as I tell you.

BETTY (*advancing to BELLAIRS with a twinkle in her eye*) : Good-bye, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : Good-bye ?—Mr. Bellairs ?—No further need ? What are you talking about ?

BETTY : Well, I don't know who's to be the odd woman here, but it won't be me. I don't know Mrs. Bellairs, so I can't leave her my love.

BELLAIRS : Have you been listening to Diana's stories ? Good bye then, my dear child. Take warning by this little exposure. The qualities I admire in women are beauty and virtue. Your looks will stand by you for some years yet. Preserve your virtue—if there's any of it left.

BELLAIRS

BETTY : You give me up all right, then ?

BELLAIRS : Don't be silly. Women have given *me* up now and then—except Diana. Go into the next studio ; I shall want you presently.

BETTY : How's that, Miss Martin ?

DIANA : After pretending penitence, Betty, and giving me your promise—

BETTY : You didn't think you were going to have it *all* your own way, did you ?

DIANA : I'm sorry. My sympathy has been lost on you. You will take the consequences.

BETTY : Ta-ta, everybody (*she goes into number one studio*).

BELLAIRS : Now (*rubbing his hands*), the moral atmosphere being cleared, isn't it time some of us made a move ? This has been a delightful interlude ; but more serious claims upon my time—

DIANA : Do you think I am beaten, Mat ?

BELLAIRS : Tch ! You couldn't be beaten. If you are going to keep this up, I shall have to take my own measures for protection. Come, what will you bet me that they will be ineffectual ?

DIANA : And if you lose, what have you to stake ?

BELLAIRS : My whole life is at stake ! But look here (*diving into a side pocket*). Here's a little sketch. Isn't it a gem ? If you win, it shall be yours. Hang it over your chaste couch, and think of me.

DIANA (*looking at the sketch*) : You sell these things for five shillings, don't you ? But I like this. I'll buy it from you now.

BELLAIRS : Five shillings ! (*striking his forehead*). Commercialism, thy name is woman ! Keep it, Diana ; and may you one day receive all things that are due to you ! (*shaking a fist at her*).

DIANA : The pictures I have paid for and never had ?

BELLAIRS : What use are pictures to you ?—You don't know how to look at them. I *do* know how to spend the money.

DIANA : When I think that I have one time admired you, and even had warmer feelings—

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : You have never admired me more than now, and I am trembling for my safety. Take her away, Scrope, before we have any exhibition of the warmer feelings.

SCROPE : Have we any excuse, Diana, for detaining Mr. Bellairs further ?

BELLAIRS : You had no excuse for coming at all, my dear sir. I hasten to add that none was needed. Come again soon. I am charmed to have made your acquaintance (*pressing his hand*).

DIANA : And now (*sitting down deliberately*), about Matilda.

BELLAIRS : Matilda ? . . . You surely are not expecting me to believe—

DIANA : Sit down, Mat ; sit down, Mortimer.

BELLAIRS : Upon my soul ! . . . More treats in store for us, Scrope ?

DIANA : Please be serious. I was never farther away from joking.

BELLAIRS : Then this will be the joke of a lifetime ! We can't afford to miss it. Sit down indeed, Mr. Scrope (*they draw up chairs*).

DIANA : Our motive in coming was to prepare you. Your wife may be expected any day. I am to write to her that it's all arranged.

BELLAIRS : You may write to her that I shall be prepared on the other side of the English Channel. Lend me ten pounds and you may call the arrangement made.

DIANA : Listen ! You will soon be in no need of ten pounds ; you will be able eventually to repay me the many sums of money I have—lent you.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! I told you, Scrope, that no apology was called for. What amazing windfall is this ? (*to DIANA*).

DIANA : It will all turn upon Matilda.

BELLAIRS : This is a fall of another sort ! Practical jokes are the sign of a barbarous mind. You asked me to be serious, Diana ; then what is the meaning of all this levity !

BELLAIRS

DIANA : You spent all Matilda's money in the first year of your married life—what she had inherited from her mother. Her father the Canon—

BELLAIRS : The old curmudgeon ! Rich as Croesus—

DIANA : —Was not, as I believe I have heard you express it, to be touched. And outraged by Matilda's marrying you—

BELLAIRS : Closed his doors to her. But this is ancient history.

DIANA : So is the responsibility I assumed ; seeing that Matilda was provided for, when your wife and child might have starved, for all you cared.

BELLAIRS : Might have ! As they did not, need we go into groundless suppositions ?

DIANA : The Canon is an old man. He was taken suddenly ill a few days ago—

BELLAIRS : Dorothy told me something about this, now you remind me.

DIANA : Matilda was wired for. I met her, and went up with her to York. We found the Canon a little rallied, and able to go into the question of his will.

BELLAIRS : Ah ! An only daughter ! Repentance of an aged father ! Do I correctly— ?

DIANA : If the Canon was outraged by Matilda's marriage, he was still more outraged by her leaving you. In a word, Mat, softened by time and approaching death—

BELLAIRS (*covering his face*) : Let us pray.

DIANA : He will leave all his property to your wife—

BELLAIRS : Dear Matilda ! So all's well that ends well !

DIANA : —On condition—

BELLAIRS : These testamentary conditions ! As if people didn't make enough trouble while living—

DIANA : —On condition of her living with her husband ! So now you know, Mat (*sitting back and fanning her face with her handkerchief*). I came back by a night train specially to tell you, and to insist upon your doing your duty.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Fortunately, I have had long practice in avoiding it. I am grateful for your warning, Diana, and when Matilda turns up I shall certainly be missing. What has Mr. Scrope to say to all this ? His face has been a picture of conflicting emotions.

SCROPE : It has been news to me, Bellairs, much more than to you. I cannot venture to enter into your private affairs, but some compromise—

DIANA : There will be no compromise at all (*rising*). If Matilda is not moved by her future interest, she will be moved by mine. I shall demand the repayment of all I have advanced to her, both the capital of her *pension* in Rome, and the cost of Dorothy's education. By the way, as soon as Dorothy comes in, Mat, you will send her home to me.

BELLAIRS : Bless my soul, I had forgotten Dorothy . . . It was my intention to plead her cause to you.

DIANA : You will be sufficiently occupied with Matilda's—and your own. Give me your arm, Mortimer, and take me now to see Mr. Barclay, this girl Betty's father.

BELLAIRS : Not through with it yet, Scrope ? In my own afflictions, I can yet spare a gesture of pity for you.

DIANA : You have nothing more to say, Mat ?

BELLAIRS : More to say ? I shall have a great deal more to say if you stay any longer. After all this disturbance I shall have to drink steadily for a week to recover my normal poise. As you are going to Mr. Barclay, leave five pounds with him at least to cover my necessities.

DIANA : You give me your word that you will take Matilda back ?

BELLAIRS : Tch ! My word believed in—

DIANA : Absolutely. Under all your affectations of want of principle—

BELLAIRS : Affecta— ! Will *nothing* I can say or do—

DIANA : Nothing. You are at heart a gentleman.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : At heart ! Nature's nobleman ! I have come down indeed ! Will you go away ! (*shaking his fists up and down*) I will not give you my word ! I will not do anything !

DIANA : Come, Mortimer.

SCROPE (*very distressed*) : If any word of apology from me, Mr. Bellairs—

BELLAIRS : Don't make it worse. Live it down. And if any evidence is required that Diana should be put under restraint, count on me. Have you both finished ?

DIANA : Goodbye, Mat, for the present. (*She and SCROPE depart through the gateway*).

BELLAIRS (*going to studio number one and pushing open the door*) : Betty !

BETTY (*coming out*) : Well, old dear ?

BELLAIRS : I'm in a devil of a mess. You'll have to set your wits to work to get me out of it.

BETTY : Oh, shall I ? (*arms a-kimbo*). Then who was this young lady who slept in there last night !

BELLAIRS : Young lady ? Oh, Dorothy.

BETTY : Dorothy, is she ? Well ?

BELLAIRS : Don't be a fool. My daughter.

BETTY : Oh ! (*in expressive enlightenment*). Then why didn't you say so at first ?

BELLAIRS : Don't bother me with stupid questions. I've got to deal with something much more formidable than a daughter. My wife—how am I to keep her off ?

BETTY : Why—was that true ? I thought Miss Martin was making it up.

BELLAIRS : Making up a bed for me to lie on—God bless my soul, for *us* to lie on !

BETTY : You and Mrs. Bellairs ? (*laughing*).

BELLAIRS : Don't laugh. It's serious. What am I to do about it ?

BELLAIRS

BETTY: Why, that's easy (*laughing still more*).

BELLAIRS: Easy? I only wish it were. What's amusing you?

BETTY: That! It!

BELLAIRS: *What?* (*as in distraction*).

BETTY: You and Mrs. Bellairs. But if you don't want to—don't you see?

BELLAIRS: If I am not to burst a blood-vessel—my time of life—! I *don't* see.

BETTY: Why, when she comes, *I* shall be there!

BELLAIRS (*stepping back*): You? . . . Blessed child!—the very thing! Come to my arms! Tch! (*falling back from their embrace as DOROTHY and GIOVANNI appear at the gate*). A moment of dizziness, Dorothy—supported to a chair. Don't be alarmed—passed off now. Go home, Betty. See what Miss Martin's saying to your father.

BETTY: Eh, what's that? She meant that too? Jimminy! (*she runs away through the gate*).

DOROTHY: Well, Daddy, what's been settled about us?

BELLAIRS: Settled? About you? *I've* nearly been settled for life. Why are you back so soon?

DOROTHY: I've talked Giovanni over. He'll marry me if Miss Martin guarantees an income.

BELLAIRS: The deuce he will! What consideration—what self-sacrifice! Unfortunately, a little premature. We didn't get to that.

DOROTHY: What do you mean?

BELLAIRS: What I say. Something much more immediate took up all our time.

DOROTHY: You mean—you didn't speak for us?

BELLAIRS: If only there'd been somebody to speak for me—!

DOROTHY: You didn't do anything for us *at all*?

GIOVANNI: *Ma che!* What did I tell you, Dorothy? (*in disgust*).

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : But Daddy—! We were depending on you.

BELLAIRS : My dear, only let me get my breath. When I explain—! Your mother is wanting to come back to me ; she will be a rich woman if she does. The results to me are too awful to contemplate. I must get out of it by hook or by crook. My life shattered—all my habits upset—the work of fifteen years—!

DOROTHY : Mother rich ? Why then!—*she* can fix it up for us.

BELLAIRS : You don't listen. She will be rich only *if* she comes back to me.

DOROTHY : But of *course* she'll come back. Why shouldn't she ? She ought to have done it long ago.

BELLAIRS : Angels and ministers of grace ! Are *you* against me, Dorothy ?

DOROTHY : How can it be against you ? It's just what I was saying last night. How could she have left you ? It's all splendid now. You'll be able to make terms for us. A good start for me and Giovanni !

BELLAIRS : Youth—youth ! The cruelty of youth ! Your start in life to be the end of mine. You, Giovanni : will you stand by, and see me afflicted in this fashion ?

GIOVANNI : Let's have a word or two about this, Dorothy. I don't like it. Not so much on Mr. Bellairs' account, as on my own. Come away for a bit.

BELLAIRS : Go away, both of you—and stay away. As if I hadn't enough on my mind already ! This is what comes of listening to you yesterday (*shaking a fist at DOROTHY*).

DOROTHY : I'm not going away. I'm going to stay here till you both come to your senses. Daddy ! When you have the power to make me happy—

BELLAIRS : Am I to be made miserable ?—wrecked, ruined and disposed of ? This is your mother's daughter ! Twenty years ago she ran off with me, against all my better instincts—

DOROTHY : I thought you ran off with her.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Tch ! As if a man had any real say in these things ! That's why I'm in such mortal terror at the present moment. And what's the matter now ? (*as BARCLAY appears in the gateway*). Anything rather than an appeal to the emotions. Come in, Mr. Barclay. Never was man more welcome.

DOROTHY : And what about us ?

BELLAIRS : Be off. Fall down a well. Take her into my studio, Giovanni. I will not be rushed ! (*shaking his fists up and down*).

GIOVANNI : Come on, Dorothy (*taking her arm*). Come on, I say (*drawing her to the studio by force. They go in*).

BELLAIRS (*dropping into a chair*) : Our daughters, Mr. Barclay—our impossible daughters !

BARCLAY : Why, it's about mine that I've come. Hope I don't intrude ? (*advancing*). As it's just on opening time, I thought I'd pop round and get it over.

BELLAIRS : The very sound of your voice is a solace to me. I hope we shall yet hear many pops together at opening time. Come and sit down ; in your presence the world returns to sanity.

BARCLAY : Wait a minute ; let me give you this—receipt for all the little sums outstanding. A friend of yours, Miss Martin, she's paid up for you.

BELLAIRS : One ray of light !—I shall hasten to re-open the account.

BARCLAY : Anything I can do for a gentleman. Now, by your leave, I'll take a chair. It's about Betty, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : A very attractive young woman ; just arrived at that time of life—

BARCLAY : When a father has either to *be* a father, or keep his eyes shut. She's been coming here a good deal lately. Now I'm not going to ask any questions—

BELLAIRS : I appreciate your tact. Few words will be needed between men of our intelligence.

BARCLAY : But as one man to another, it's got to stop.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS (*comfortably*): It has to stop. Everything stops sooner or later.

BARCLAY: I warned her off monkeying about with boys when she was younger—with a strap. Now she's a young woman and has been in service, I'm not such a fool as to think I can keep her off men if she's a mind that way. I don't know whether you've been tampering with her virtue, and I don't want to know. Just as likely she's been tampering with yours, as her mother before her did with mine. So long as it was all snug among ourselves, I kept myself *to* myself. But when this Miss Martin walks into my place and brings a parson with her—well, it's getting a bit thick.

BELLAIRS: It is indeed. We must lay our heads together, Mr. Barclay; metaphorically speaking, of course.

BARCLAY: Now I'm not going to have Betty getting a bad name. And I'm not going to run any risk of getting one myself. You see that, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS: I see it very clearly. I am glad to find you are such a right-thinking man.

BARCLAY: Miss Martin said you were a bad influence, and that I must take Betty out of it. She made the parson back her up—said she'd send him to see the parson of this parish. He jibbed a bit at that, but you see it's serious. If I get these purity people down on me—

BELLAIRS: Not to be thought of. But you magnify the danger; I will answer for Miss Martin.

BARCLAY: Well, that's that. If that had been all, I might just have given you a nod in the bar to put you wise. But it seems this Miss Martin has taken a liking to Betty. She's offered to take her off my hands, and come down with cash as compensation. Now I was glad to have Betty back when the wife died, but I've often thought that a public isn't the best place for a girl these days. The business is not what it used to be. They may be shutting us up, as they've done in America, and then what shall I do for a living? After all, Mr. Bellairs, we most of us come to depend on our children in our old age. It's a provision of the

BELLAIRS

Lord's making : that's why I don't hold with these atheists. I've only got the one ; and if there's a rich woman ready both to pay me something handsome and to give Betty a start in life, I don't want to stand in her light, if you understand me.

BELLAIRS : I understand you very well. We must neither of us stand in Betty's light, Mr. Barclay.

BARCLAY : Very good. Now Miss Martin's offer is conditional on Betty's seeing no more of you. So I came to tell you that I'm going to hoof her out of this, once for all.

BELLAIRS : My dear sir ! Do you think such a thing can be done with a young woman like Betty ?

BARCLAY : She's a bit of a teaser, I know (*scratching his head*). She was listening behind a door half the time Miss Martin was speaking. But the two of us together—

BELLAIRS : Tch ! There are very old and close ties between us, Mr. Barclay, but *do* you think we can take the high hand ? If you resort to such expedients as hoofing her out of this, will she be any the easier to manage ? You and I are after all Victorians, but young people nowadays are not to be treated in such fashion. We can no longer shut up our daughters in the cellar on bread and water ; we no longer correct our wives with the poker, more's the pity. Come, come, my dear sir. If you are not very careful, it is you who are going to suffer. You have some claims to consider me a friend of your family. Why not call on me alone, to exert my influence with Betty !

BARCLAY : I have my doubts about the influence, you see.

BELLAIRS : How can you say so, with me before you ? How easily she might have fallen into undesirable hands !

BARCLAY : Well, hasn't she, in yours ! I've had some thoughts, in all this botheration, of hitting you on the nose.

BELLAIRS : That would be a move, certainly (*rubbing his nose*). If it would be any satisfaction to you, let us rise, and put ourselves into postures of defence. But will it advance the argument at all ?

BELLAIRS

BARCLAY : I'm not so sure it wouldn't. Damn it, it's you that stands in the way.

BELLAIRS : On the contrary, it's I who have given Betty this opportunity. Would Miss Martin have come down with her offer, if I hadn't made the market ? Try your paternal methods with Betty by all means ; and when they have failed, fall back upon me. Wait till in the exercise of your high duties this evening you see me drop in as usual. Meanwhile, you musn't let me detain you—

BARCLAY : You're a cool hand, Mr. Bellairs (*struggling up*) ; I never knew a cooler. You may be right about Betty. I'll think it over.

BELLAIRS : You couldn't do a wiser thing (*also risen*). You know my principle : never do today—except of course in such matters as opening on time (*looking at his watch*). Bless my soul, you must hurry. I'm afraid I shall be myself detained a few minutes—

BARCLAY : Always glad to see you. I can't say I've lost on you, Mr. Bellairs (*he takes his leave*).

BELLAIRS (*turning, as DOROTHY and GIOVANNI come out of the studio*) : Tch ! Lovers in my day had to be dragged out of seclusion. What's this ? Giovanni frowning, and you Dorothy in tears ?

DOROTHY : It's all over. Giovanni won't do what I tell him. You needn't take mother back—I'm going home to Miss Martin.

BELLAIRS : All over ? Giovanni won't do— ? I needn't— ? What are you talking about now !

GIOVANNI : I've told Dorothy I've had enough of all this hanky-panky. I'm not going to be led about on a string. If she won't wait for me, *Basta !* First it was Miss Martin, and now it's a mother-in-law. I'm off !

BELLAIRS : You certainly won't leave an impression of good manners behind you. Remarkable how the mother-in-law, as a comic idea, is with us always ; if we lost it, I should feel we had passed the summit of our greatness. But you, with your Latin

BELLAIRS

origin ? Come, we are getting on ! I hadn't expected an advocate in this quarter. But I can't have you treating Dorothy in this way. Make it up with her at once.

GIOVANNI : How are you going to treat her ; have you come round about Mrs. Bellairs ?

BELLAIRS : You make my head turn round, between you. Kiss and be friends, and let us have no more of this foolishness.

DOROTHY : But *have* you come round, Daddy ?

BELLAIRS : I will not be badgered ! Here am I trying to do my best for both of you—time passing—get Dorothy a taxi, Giovanni (GIOVANNI *flings off through the gate*). I'm going to send you home, my dear ; very sensible of you to be going back. Give my love to Diana.

DOROTHY : But what's going to happen ?

BELLAIRS : I don't *know* what's going to happen. Anything might happen, after a morning like this. If you don't give me time for reflection, I will wash my hands of you. Just sit quietly at home and wait.

DOROTHY : I've nothing to wait for. Now Giovanni—

BELLAIRS : Take no notice of Giovanni ; I'll deal with him ! He's been quick (*as a motor horn sounds at the end of the passage*). Don't let him see you crying. There, there, my dear. Give me a kiss. Is your rucksack ready ?

DOROTHY : I'll get it (*she goes into number one studio*).

GIOVANNI (*reappearing*) : There was a taxi passing.

BELLAIRS : You'll put Dorothy into it, and speak kindly to her (*shaking a fist at him*). I don't know how everything is going to end, but men should never discuss their affairs before women. Come and see me this evening.

GIOVANNI : All right (*grudgingly*).

BELLAIRS : You don't deserve the consideration I am showing you. Please don't flatter yourself ; it is for Dorothy's sake. Here she is (*as she comes out with the rucksack*). No leave-takings in my

BELLAIRS

presence. For God's sake, let me have a respite from you. Bless you both ; I am charmed to have made your acquaintance.

DOROTHY : Good bye, Daddy.

BELLAIRS : The first cheering word I have heard for an hour back. Many to come, I hope, when all this is over. Will—you—go !

[They pass out together, GIOVANNI taking the sack. BELLAIRS drops into a chair and mops his face. A moment later BETTY stands in the gateway, holding up a pint pot with a smile.]

BETTY : Hallo ? I thought that after such a morning you might be thirsty.

BELLAIRS (*springing up*) : Welcome child ! What a morning !

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT THREE

Evening of the same day, in BELLAIRS' studio. Towards sunset.

BELLAIRS, in cotton overall, is sitting painting in the left hand far corner, where the light falls on his canvas from the north light above him. Door centre at back with window beside it, curtained; doors right and left into kitchen and bedroom respectively. The studio is a dusty workshop, with little furniture; many canvasses with face to the walls. A table in the centre; some brown-backed books in shelves; settee on our left by the stove; a window seat. BELLAIRS is absorbed in his work, painting from a study; he fails to hear a knock on the door. The door opening, BETTY enters, carrying a basket with parcels.

BETTY: Still at work?

BELLAIRS: Go away; I'm busy.

BETTY: It's past your usual time for knocking off.

BELLAIRS: Is it? (*looking up*). So it is; the light's going. What have you got there?

BETTY: Wait and see (*she puts the basket on the table and comes to his side*). Still on that thing? (*looking at the canvas*).

BELLAIRS: What do you think of it?

BETTY: Well, I suppose there *are* people who like all these bits of things.

BELLAIRS: Refreshing person. Never live with a woman who thinks she understands your work!

BETTY: Why have you never painted me?

BELLAIRS: I always improve upon nature. I prefer you with all your imperfections (*rising and pinching her cheek*).

BETTY: I thought you might be feeling depressed . . . (*evidently not too happy*).

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Why ? I am never depressed. Depression comes of not knowing what you want, and foolishly going after things you *don't* want.

BETTY : And if things happen you don't like ?

BELLAIRS : Retire out of their reach, and think about something interesting. What's the matter ?

BETTY : Oh, nothing. Have you forgotten ?

BELLAIRS : Forgotten what ? (*taking off his overall*).

BETTY : This morning.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! I *had* forgotten. Wasn't it a time ! (*hanging his overall on a nail, and taking his coat from the back of a chair*).

BETTY : And it's not over yet.

BELLAIRS : Everything is over as soon as you stop worrying about it.

BETTY : You haven't got a father to deal with.

BELLAIRS : You remind me that I have a daughter. And a wife ! But sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. What's in this basket ?

BETTY : Several things (*following him to the table*).

BELLAIRS : I see the necks of two bottles, and every indication of materials for dinner. How have you managed it ?

BETTY : Guess.

BELLAIRS : Can you see me doing anything so childish ? And what are these parcels ?

BETTY : Sheets—pillow slips—towels.

BELLAIRS : Upon my word ! You seem to have been going it, however it's been done.

BETTY : It's Miss Martin.

BELLAIRS : Our chaste Diana ? Explain yourself.

BETTY : She sent a messenger boy to me this afternoon, with money, and a list of things to get in.

BELLAIRS : This is considerate. But why sheets and the rest ?

BELLAIRS

BETTY : She looked at your bed this morning, and said everything was deplorable.

BELLAIRS : Tch ! Cleanliness is next to godliness, but I'm not sure that this interest on Diana's part can be given that name.

BETTY : It's about up with you and me, I'm thinking.

BELLAIRS : You mean that Diana herself has amorous intentions? That would put *your* light out, wouldn't it, Betty ?

BETTY : Go on—laugh at me. I'm used to it.

BELLAIRS : I hope you *are* used to it. Fancy your being in love with me !

BETTY : Yes—fancy it ! You'd chuck me out in a minute if it suited you.

BELLAIRS : Why, naturally. The point is that it doesn't suit me.

BETTY : Would you like me to live with you altogether—sleep here, I mean ?

BELLAIRS : Certainly not. I should have to drive you out with a stick. What I want to do is to welcome you in.

BETTY : There's not much future with *you*, is there ?

BELLAIRS : None whatever—if you want to think about the future. It doesn't exist, of course ; all the time you give to thinking about the future is so much time lost in the present, which does exist. But I see ; Diana has been putting ideas into your head. You've listened to the serpent—

BETTY : Oh, it didn't need Miss Martin. I've had ideas for some time. It's all right for you, but where do *I* come in ?

BELLAIRS : Nowhere, if you once go out. This is a moral crisis for you. Put the voice of the tempter behind you.

BETTY : There you are (*turning her back*).

BELLAIRS : Shapely (*putting up his eyeglasses*). It was designed by nature to invite pursuit. Do you *want* to keep on with me ?

BETTY (*turning*) : I may change my mind tomorrow.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Tomorrow ! (*dropping his glasses*). Do anything you like tomorrow—change your nose, change anything that's physical, but your mind you will have to put up with. Good God ! (*as there comes a loud knock at the door*). What will this be ?

BETTY : I'll go and see. (*She opens the door to a Telegraph Boy*).
Bellaïrs ? That's here (*she closes the door and brings a telegram to BELLAIRS*).

BELLAIRS : A telegram, for me ? Read it out.

BETTY (*having opened the envelope, reads*) : " Expect me tonight —Matilda " (*looking blankly at BELLAIRS*).

BELLAIRS : Matilda ? My wife ! Give it to me (*taking the form and reading it*). It is indeed ! (*dropping the form*).

BETTY : That about puts the lid on it. Miss Martin said it would.

BELLAIRS : Diana ? Great heavens, this explains the sheets.

BETTY : Ha, ha ! I thought she must be up to something. I'll be getting along then.

BELLAIRS : You'll do nothing of the kind. When you are all I have for protection ? You musn't leave me for a single moment.

BETTY : Oh, you want me now, do you ?

BELLAIRS : I should think I *do* want you. Day and night till the danger is past. I capitulate. Do what you like with me, only don't desert me !

BETTY : Well, I'll see it out. I'd better be getting the dinner ready (*beginning to pick up parcels*). I'll lay the table for two.

BELLAIRS : You certainly *will* lay the table for two—for you and me. We'll lock the door (*going to do so*). Which reminds me : I am in need of a little support. Where's my hat ? (*taking it from a peg*). When I have had one or two drinks—

BETTY : And what am I to do if she comes ? (*picking up the telegram*).

BELLAIRS : Hold the fort. I will keep an eye on the passage as I stand in the bar. There are tremendous moments in the most inconspicuous lives. I'm almost afraid to go out.

BELLAIRS

BETTY : You needn't worry yet (*looking at the form*). This was sent from York.

BELLAIRS : Was it ? Then that gives us an hour or two ; I breathe again. But all the same, keep the door locked. I'll knock three times when I come back, so that you'll know it's me.

BETTY : Cheer up, old thing. But you'll have to square father !

BELLAIRS : Square a man of Mr. Barclay's figure ? And why square is better than round—the mysteries of popular language !

BETTY : Bother popular language. Don't be balmy.

BELLAIRS : Balmy—that's you (*returning to give her a kiss*) : fragrant, mild, soothing, healing : I wish I could get you to read the dictionary. Old Railway Guides are very good, but they require a fine taste in literature. I rely on your ingenious devilry, Betty.

BETTY : Go along, and have your drinks.

[She pushes him away and he goes out, she putting a catch on the door when he has gone. She then returns to the table, takes the parcels with sheets, etc., out of the basket and carries them into the bedroom. Returning, she is lifting the basket to take it into the kitchen, when she is arrested by an ordinary rap on the door. Putting down the basket, she stands hesitating a moment, then creeps round by the wall, and lifting the curtain of the window by the door, peeps out. Apparently satisfied, she opens the door a few inches.]

GIOVANNI (*outside*) : I say, is Mr. Bellairs in ?

BETTY : No, he's out. Call tomorrow.

GIOVANNI : He told me to call this evening. Will he be long ?

BETTY : That depends. Is there anybody out there with you ?

GIOVANNI : No. Can't you see there isn't ? Mr. Bellairs wants to have a talk with me. Where is he ?

BETTY : That would be telling. What's it about ?

GIOVANNI : Come on, now ; let me in. You'll catch it from Mr. Bellairs if you don't.

BELLAIRS

BETTY : That's my racket. But let's have a look at you (*admitting him, and switching on light*).

GIOVANNI (*throwing down his hat and looking round*) : Is he really out ?

BETTY : I told you so (*looking him up and down*).

GIOVANNI : You're the girl I saw this morning.

BETTY : And what if you did ?

GIOVANNI : What's the game here ? Afraid of something ?

BETTY : Who are *you* ?

GIOVANNI : No mystery about that. My name's Giovanni Lanza. I came here with Mr. Bellairs' daughter.

BETTY : Well, that introduces you, Mr. Whatever-it-is. Eye-talian ?

GIOVANNI : You're London, anyhow. Area steps ! I'll take a look round.

BETTY (*watching, as he moves round the studio*) : Make yourself at home, won't you ?

GIOVANNI : Pretty good, some of these pictures (*drawing back a canvas from the wall*).

BETTY : You've got some sauce (*advancing*). Leave those alone !

GIOVANNI : I've looked at pictures in my time. Artist, all right (*holding up a canvas with its back to us*). Worth money, some day.

BETTY : Put it down. He won't have them looked at, unless he shows them in a frame. Are you a dealer ?

GIOVANNI : Hell ! (*putting back the canvas and facing her*). Are you his servant—or his mistress !

BETTY : Be civil.

GIOVANNI : Both, probably. What's made you take up with an old man like Bellairs ? You're not a professional model.

BETTY : Mind your own business. How do you know I'm not a model ?

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI : No interest when I looked at the picture. You'd have wanted to know if it was one of you.

BETTY : You take a powerful lot of notice, eh ?

GIOVANNI : Don't mind me. Get on with your work (*taking a chair and fitting a cigarette into a long holder*).

BETTY : Well, you're a—I won't say what you are.

GIOVANNI : Have a shot at it. What am I ?

BETTY : Ice cream man ?

GIOVANNI : *Sacc-r-r-* ! Don't you know a gentleman when you see one ? (*with sardonic humour*).

BETTY : Glad you've mentioned it. Saves mistakes.

GIOVANNI : What do you make of Mr. Bellairs ? (*leaning back, pulling at his cigarette*).

BETTY : He'll make short work of you, I'm thinking.

GIOVANNI : Pretty hard up, isn't he ?

BETTY : Oh, you never know.

GIOVANNI : Ever heard of Mrs. Bellairs ?

BETTY : Here, what are you getting at ? (*advancing a step*).

GIOVANNI : Take a hint. That's all.

BETTY : You take yourself off ! (*of the streets*).

GIOVANNI : *Ma che !* I know your kind. I've had some !

BETTY : Want any more ? (*Three knocks at the door*). Here's Mr. Bellairs. He'll deal with you (*she goes to the door and admits* BELLAIRS. GIOVANNI rises).

BELLAIRS : Tch ! Fancy finding you here !

GIOVANNI : You asked me to come, you know.

BELLAIRS : So I did ; rather to be free of you on the last occasion than in the hope of pleasures to come. Go into the kitchen, Betty. Where will you sit ? (*to GIOVANNI*). Perhaps an easy chair will help to civilize you.

GIOVANNI : Quite comfortable where I was, Mr. Bellairs (*as BETTY takes up the basket and carries it into the kitchen*).

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : And I am fortified for the ordeal before me. Now, my dear Giovanni (*as they take chairs*)—age and my forthcoming relation to you warrant, I hope, a continuance of that familiarity—we will not waste words. You have an objection to being provided for. An extraordinary position to take up, but it takes all sorts to make a world.

GIOVANNI : Well ? (*on his guard*).

BELLAIRS : In human affairs a little conflict will arise now and then, but among enlightened people, no tragedies. It is moral character that makes tragedy ; I am thankful to say I have none. This is manifestly a case for good sense. Don't you agree with me ?

GIOVANNI : Well, in a manner of speaking.

BELLAIRS : We will avoid such ambiguities as manner of speaking. The common ground between us is, that we have *both* an objection to being provided for, if for very different reasons.

GIOVANNI : What I object to is being led round like a monkey on a chain, for nuts to be thrown to me. I'll make my own way as I've always done, or get to hell out of this.

BELLAIRS : You express yourself with admirable verve. As we have common ground, let us make common cause. Your very apt illustration about the monkey—Perhaps derived from your immediate forbears—?

GIOVANNI (*rising*) : Mr. Bellairs, my Italian father was a gentleman ; my English mother was not a lady.

BELLAIRS : I am rebuked (*having risen*). Gentlemen will do these things sometimes, to the confusing of social distinctions. I shall be proud to have my own unsullied blood restore the balance. May we sit down again ? Thank you (*as GIOVANNI sits, with no good grace*). I was about to remind you that you are jumping rather hastily to conclusions. I will merely say, avoiding the subject of nuts, that it may not be at all as you anticipate. Cannot we wait quietly to see what may be done ?

GIOVANNI : What *can* there be done ! And first of all, what are you going to do ?

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : I, my dear young friend, shall follow my lifelong practice of doing nothing at all—leaving it to circumstances to work on my behalf : with, of course, a little intelligent nursing of the circumstances. I have only been wondering whether in taking up myself a position of disinterestedness, I cannot forward your interest. By which, I need not say, I mean my daughter Dorothy's. For as to yourself, my dear Giovanni—

GIOVANNI : I know all about that. And if I may say so—

BELLAIRS : You return the compliment. We have met under a disadvantage. If it had been by accident in a public house, the charms of your nature—

GIOVANNI : Cut it out, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : My mention of Dorothy recalls us to the point. If she insists on my wife's coming back to me, how can I, with the feelings of a devoted father, resist her pleading! You have influence with her. As a first step to—to settling your business, let me enlist you on my side. Co-operate with me in choking off Matilda; represent to Dorothy that my sacrifice does not at all imply her mother's acceptance of you—rather the contrary, if it means her becoming rich. Think what mothers are !—think of the prospect opened out of eligible sons-in-law ! If I may emulate your powers of language, you won't have an earthly. Help me in this, and then as a mouse may help a lion—

GIOVANNI : Is that all ? Just your own miserable license—with that girl ?

BELLAIRS : It appears that that girl is going to be my sole defender. And if you take my license to be miserable, you are very much mistaken. Well Giovanni (*rising*), I was hoping, with time, to give you a shove along the primrose path. Now go and deal with your affairs in your own way. Matilda will make short work of you.

GIOVANNI : Much you care for Dorothy ! (*risen*).

BELLAIRS : If she's to be saved from you, better perhaps the short, sharp pang—under a mother's care—you had a mother yourself—

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI (*roughly*): Keep off it!

BELLAIRS: You are quite right; all your Latin instincts rally to the defence of the family. The family is the backbone of Europe, and will redeem us yet. Some of us will not live to see it; there are consolations—I mean, it is a consolation to think we are bequeathing the brighter hope to our descendants. Among whom, Giovanni (*with pathos*) I had hoped to number your children! Where is your hat?

GIOVANNI: Never mind my hat (*going to pick it up on his way to the door*). Do you take me for a fool? (*turning*).

BELLAIRS: Tch! Why waste words on the self-evident? But keep your temper. There may still be a happy issue out of all our difficulties. And you will always find a refuge here.

GIOVANNI: Good night (*walking out*): Hey! (*backing in again*). There's a lady coming this way, with a bag.

BELLAIRS: For God's sake!—come in or go out. Betty! (*calling in agitation*). Will you come out of the doorway! (*pulling in desperation at GIOVANNI*).

GIOVANNI (*pulled in*): What the—!

[*BETTY runs in from the kitchen in an apron.*]

BELLAIRS (*bolting the door*): Who can this be but Matilda? Put out the lights, Betty.

BETTY: What's the use of that? (*taking off her apron hastily as she crosses the studio*). She's at the door by this time. Come with me into the bedroom—I'll settle it. Let Mr. Eye-italian open the door. Don't ask any questions—hurry! (*she bolts into the bedroom*).

BELLAIRS (*shaking his fists up and down*): Anywhere on earth—desert island—no entanglements. There she is! (*as a knock sounds*). Receive her, Giovanni. Do something with her—take her away—put her in the stove. Charmed to have made your acquaintance—(*he runs after BETTY, closing the door*).

GIOVANNI: Here! Mr. Bellairs! (*following, and opening the door*).

BETTY (*inside*): Go away! (*the door is slammed to*).

BELLAIRS

GIOVANNI : *Che diavolo ! (as the knock is repeated)*. Very well, then—*(after hesitating another moment, he goes to open the outer door)*.

MATILDA : I beg your pardon, but isn't this the studio of Mr. Matthew Bellairs ?

GIOVANNI : Yes. Won't you come in ?

MATILDA : Thank you *(she enters, carrying a dispatch case : a woman with a firm mouth and experienced eyes)*. Isn't Mr. Bellairs at home ? *(glancing round)*.

GIOVANNI : He's about, somewhere . . .

MATILDA : Are you a friend of his ? I'm his wife.

GIOVANNI : Not exactly a friend, Mrs. Bellairs. My name's Lanza.

MATILDA : Not the Giovanni Miss Martin wired me about this morning ? *(looking at him keenly)*.

GIOVANNI : Oh, she wired, did she ? No good denying it—I am.

MATILDA : Well—I'm glad to see you, Mr. Lanza *(severely)*, but I hardly expected to find you here.

GIOVANNI : It's not my doing. Mr. Bellairs asked me to come . . . I'm afraid you may be prejudiced against me.

MATILDA : A little, I confess. But as I don't yet know much about you, I'll think the best *(she lays her dispatch case on the table)*. Where is my husband ?

GIOVANNI : Look here, Mrs. Bellairs. I don't like this, and I'm not in any way to blame for it. I think you'd better go away.

MATILDA : Go away ? What nonsense. I've come specially from the north to see Matthew ; he must be expecting me.

GIOVANNI *(not able to control a smile)* : He was expecting you, all right.

MATILDA : You are concealing something. It doesn't do you any good in my eyes. Will you please explain yourself ?

GIOVANNI : I'll have it in for him, for this !

BELLAIRS

MATILDA : I know your countrymen rather well, Mr. Lanza. Put any thought of *dispetto* out of your mind. I can well imagine that you have a grievance against my husband, but I am not interested. Will you tell me whether he is in or out ?

GIOVANNI : He's in.

MATILDA : Thank you. Then while we wait for him to appear (*sitting down and taking off her gloves*), I'll tell you what I've heard about you. It is, that you have attempted to run away with my daughter Dorothy.

GIOVANNI : Who's told you that ?

MATILDA : Sit down, please ; and don't bare your teeth. That is what Miss Martin wired to me.

GIOVANNI : Miss Martin did ?—when I went to her first thing this morning to say it was the other way about—but never mind that ; when she thanked me for what she called my honourable behaviour and said she had been mistaken in me—*Saccer-r-r !*

MATILDA : You don't know Miss Martin very well, perhaps (*relaxing in a smile*). If it will relieve your feelings, I didn't believe a word of it. Especially as I had been told about you already—by Dorothy. I had a long letter from her, at York, and I can easily fill in the gaps. I won't go as far as to thank you, but I believe you have not behaved badly.

GIOVANNI : Listen, Mrs. Bellairs ! If ever a man has been on the gridiron—

MATILDA : That will do. I didn't come here to talk about you and Dorothy ; there will be ample time in the next two or three years. I smell cooking, so I suppose Matthew is in the kitchen. He used to be a very good cook—many worthless men are. Which is the kitchen ? (*rising*). That ? (*as GIOVANNI rising too nods towards the left*). And the other door is no doubt the bedroom. I'll go in and look at my face. I am straight from the train ; and after an absence of more than fifteen years—

GIOVANNI : Don't move ! (*in genuine distress*). Are you sure you're wanted ?

BELLAIRS

MATILDA : It's none of your business, anyhow, Mr. Lanza.

GIOVANNI : Do hold on a minute, Mrs. Bellairs. You may not find things here quite what you expect.

MATILDA : Oh yes, I shall ! What is the matter with you ?

GIOVANNI : Suffering Jesus ! What am I to do about it ?

MATILDA : Learn not to use such vulgar expressions, for one thing.

GIOVANNI : Come away with me ! This is no place for you.

MATILDA : Perhaps not, but you will allow me to judge. Am I to ask *you* to go, Mr. Lanza ?

GIOVANNI : Here, I'll knock on the door (*going to the bedroom door*). Mr. Bellairs ! Come out, for God's sake !

[*The door opens, and BELLAIRS comes out, rubbing his hands briskly.*]

BELLAIRS : Matilda ! After all these years ! I have been unhappily detained—sad seizure of a young friend of mine. Don't go, Giovanni ! And how have you been keeping, my dear ? (*taking MATILDA's hands*). I never saw you looking better. But you have come at a most inopportune moment ; I have had to put this poor young woman to bed (*GIOVANNI with a shrug retires to a corner*).

MATILDA : What poor young woman ? (*her mouth twitching*).

BELLAIRS : She has these attacks. Nothing dangerous. A good night's rest—perfect quiet—and she will be all right in the morning.

MATILDA : Oh, indeed ?

BELLAIRS : She is asleep now. Life might be in danger if disturbed—medical opinion—everything necessary has been done. Any other occasion—Giovanni will see you home. He was a witness—

GIOVANNI : I say—keep me out of it.

MATILDA : I see. Mr. Lanza has surprised you in some *liaison*. But I am a woman of few prejudices—

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Tch : What kind of company have you been keeping ? But you really must see that your presence here is very irregular. I have just run out—press your hand—earlier days ! But I must return at once to the sick room.

MATILDA : Shall I go for a doctor ?

BELLAIRS : Go for a doctor ? Go away ! Go into the next county ! You can't stay here.

MATILDA : I will see this young woman. Please let me pass.

BELLAIRS : She told me this would clinch the business ! (*shaking his fists up and down*). Is a seizure nothing to you—is propriety ? I appeal to your decent feelings. This is a case for the police to interfere.

MATILDA : It's no use, Matthew ; I'm going in (*she does so*).

BELLAIRS : Is this filial conduct on the part of a future son-in-law ? (*shaking a fist at GIOVANNI*). Didn't I tell you to send her away ?

GIOVANNI : Well, I tried to (*advancing*). And much reason for taking your part, I don't think—mixing me up in all this flim-flam. What sort of impression is Mrs. Bellairs going to have of my associates ?

BELLAIRS : I can only hope she will have a conclusive one of mine. Is that her bag ? (*going to the table*).

GIOVANNI : I suppose it is (*moving off in dudgeon*).

BELLAIRS : It doesn't look like things for the night. I begin to think things are not so bad as they might be. And I pin unbounded faith in Betty.

GIOVANNI : Do you ? I wouldn't ! Tell me (*coming back with a grin*) ; did she undress and get into bed ?

BELLAIRS : She got into bed, but there was no need to go to extremities. She put some white powder on her face, and I covered her up to the chin.

GIOVANNI : Then they'll be out in a minute. I told you so (*retiring as BETTY comes out, followed by MATILDA*).

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : This is a remarkable cure ! How was it done, Matilda ?

MATILDA : I merely ordered her to get up, Matthew. The young person is intelligent, and saw at a glance that there was no playing any games with me. She tells me that her home is just by ; and before I do anything more, I am going to see that she goes there.

BELLAIRS : Are you going to desert me, Betty ?

BETTY : Well, I've had one of your friends going to father already. I'm not going to have another, unless I'm there to look after myself. You'd better make up your mind to it, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : Make up my mind, when it's been made up these past fifteen or twenty years ? Once more, then, my dear child : I won't allude to your virtue, for it is plain there is *none* of it left. Goodbye ; and may you not live to repent—

MATILDA : That's enough. I am waiting.

BETTY : So long, old dear (*as she goes to the door with MATILDA*).

BELLAIRS : And not a moment longer ! (*They go out*). The spectacle, my dear Giovanni, of female perfidy !

GIOVANNI : Seems to me, Mr. Bellairs, that you've asked for it, and you've got it.

BELLAIRS : And yet my spirits begin to rise. Let us sit down, and dismiss these frivolities for a few minutes. We have not yet had an opportunity to talk about anything interesting. I'm an ignoramus on the subject of music, but perhaps you are not wholly innocent of painting ?

GIOVANNI : Well, I know a picture when I see it. I've been looking at some of yours. They are good stuff.

BELLAIRS : There is at once a bond between us ! Why didn't we start on this, instead of all that nonsense ? It will be a pleasure to have you a member of my family.

GIOVANNI : I don't know about that yet. But if it *should* come to my marrying Dorothy—

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : If it should ? How often am I to tell you that it will ! You will find Matilda a delightful inmate—

GIOVANNI : Still working on that ? But what I was going to say—

BELLAIRS : *Was* going ? Say it, say it ! Life is too short—

GIOVANNI : *If* we should marry, you'll be wanting to give us a wedding present. How about one or two pictures ?

BELLAIRS : One or two ? You are modest ! You must come and select them. Be sure to make an appointment.

GIOVANNI : I don't know about that. You mightn't be in, you know !

BELLAIRS : Eh ? Tch ! (*as this sinks in*). The nation of Machiavelli ! I confess I was not quite on your level, but I can take the hint. Speaking seriously, Miss Martin must have several of my canvasses lying about. She doesn't know how to value them ; and a little diplomacy on your part—Botheration ! (*as there is again a knock at the door*) ; just as we were beginning to understand each other. I am exhausted by all these comings and goings. Be so affable as to open the door.

[GIOVANNI *doing so*, admits DIANA and SCROPE, the latter in a black frock coat.

DIANA : You here, Giovanni ?

BELLAIRS : Upon my soul— ! (*rising*).

GIOVANNI : It's happened somehow (*to DIANA*).

DIANA : That turns out quite conveniently. Dorothy will be coming in about twenty minutes. We want a little private talk with Mr. Bellairs ; if you would go away, and be on the look out for Dorothy's taxi ; bring her straight in when she arrives—

BELLAIRS : Go on, Diana ; these are your premises, not mine !

DIANA : I will deal with you presently, Mat. Do you mind, Giovanni ?

GIOVANNI : I'll go (*picking up his hat*). That wasn't a very good turn you did me this morning, Miss Martin.

BELLAIRS

DIANA : This morning ? I gave you every encouragement in my power.

GIOVANNI : What about that telegram ?

DIANA : Oh, has Matilda been here before us ? (*advancing into the studio*). Run along, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI : *Grr-r-r ! (he throws on his hat and goes out)*.

BELLAIRS : So you've come back, Diana : to witness the spectacle of a shattered life. Mr. Scrope too—and in full panoply of war ! I had thought better of you, Scrope.

DIANA : Never mind Mortimer—

BELLAIRS : But I *do* mind Mortimer. I beg your pardon, my dear sir. I mind the whole boiling of you—if Mr. Scrope will overlook, in my extremity, a vulgar expression. I should not in general follow in the footsteps of Giovanni ; but on this occasion—(*making for the door*).

DIANA : Come back, Mat.

BELLAIRS : If I had the means to do it, I should go to the remotest public house in London and sleep where I fell. In the only place where credit is open to me—and for that I have to thank you, Diana—my wife is in possession ! (*returning*). And all the time (*shaking his fists up and down*), the immortal remark made by the Governor of North Carolina to the Governor of South Carolina—

DIANA : Your case is nearer than Carolina. Put the idea of drinks out of your mind.

BELLAIRS : Put— ! *Do* you think I have come to my time of life to do anything so foolish ? If you insist on my remaining here, Mr. Scrope must positively come to the rescue. My dear Scrope ! You have doubtless done a thousand works of charity. Do here the thousand and first. Run to the public house at the corner, and bring in whatever you may prefer at this hour of the day.

DIANA : Outrageous ! Do nothing of the kind, Mortimer.

SCROPE : I think, Diana, that in this instance I will sink the clergyman in the man. Mr. Bellairs has met us throughout in a very considerate spirit. I will gladly do what you ask, Bellairs.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRE : This is the Church that has made England what she is (*grasping his hand*). I will lend you a little black bag. If I might suggest, unsweetened. Do you remember Ally Sloper ?

SCROPE : Very well. And if I remember aright, he carried it in his tail pocket. Never mind the bag.

DIANA : Men !

BELLAIRS (*with solicitude*) : Put on your hat. Allow me (*opening the door for him*). Mind the step, my dear sir. You know the way ?

SCROPE : Perfectly well (*he goes out*).

DIANA : Men !

BELLAIRS : For men must work and women must weep (*coming from the door*). Ah, Diana, this gives us a few moments alone. Kiss me.

DIANA : No (*stepping back*). You have violated every womanly instinct in me.

BELLAIRS : I see my mistake. If I had followed my own instincts with you, you would have had for me ever afterwards that especial tenderness a woman reserves for her seducer. Whereas now—

DIANA : Whereas now, your random life is ended. Matilda wired me—

BELLAIRS : She wired me too. What's more, she has come. We must put up a counter move, or I am lost. Tch ! (*as a thought strikes him*). Do you see what you have done, Diana ?

DIANA : And what have I done ?

BELLAIRS : You have brought me to a possible solution of all my difficulties. When Matilda comes back, everything must have been arranged between us.

DIANA : Everything *will* be arranged—to my satisfaction.

BELLAIRS : We must give it out that we have come to an understanding. I have fortunately provided ample grounds for divorce—

DIANA : For *what* ?

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : And you will marry me as soon as the law will permit it. Hold up ! (*as she staggers*). Moderate your transports.

DIANA : Do you say this *now* ? . . . And if there weren't a thousand other reasons why I should not—when I have seen Miss Betty Barclay ?

BELLAIRS : Whom you have been at such pains to separate from me ? I see it all, Diana ; you have been working up to this from the beginning.

DIANA : Stop ! Do you really think—

BELLAIRS : If *you* had stopped to think, you wouldn't have been in it as you are now. You will take part with me in a little humorous conspiracy. This will choke off Matilda ; and you will of course on your side make a modest provision for Dorothy.

DIANA : Give me a chair, Mortimer—I mean, Mat.

BELLAIRS : Apropos !—the Rector of St. Timothy's—he shall be cast to marry us. No wonder if you are feeling a little faint (*putting her into a chair*). It's nothing to what one or two of the others will feel, when we have made our announcement.

DIANA : And I thought I knew you ! . . . This passes everything. It's at least to your credit that you have remembered Dorothy. Well, Mat (*looking up at him innocently*), suppose I were to take you at your word ?

BELLAIRS : You certainly *will* take me at my word—until I am out of the mess you have got me into.

DIANA : Oh indeed ? I thought it all turned on Matilda ; or more correctly, her father the Canon.

BELLAIRS : Cannons to the right of them, cannons to the left— ! (*shaking his fists up and down*). I had forgotten the Canon.

DIANA : And forgotten Matilda, apparently. Do you imagine she will consent to divorce you ?

BELLAIRS : I don't imagine anything. Imagination falls dead before Matilda. Something has got to be done—anything to make a diversion—confuse the issue—this as likely as anything else. If you don't give me your word to do something yourself—

BELLAIRS

DIANA : Even to the point of actually marrying you ? After all, it's a question of money, and I have plenty.

BELLAIRS : That would be a recoil, with a vengeance ; for me, a stepping out of the frying pan into the fire. But if you insist upon the frying pan, better the fire of your attractions— ! I shall call it settled.

DIANA : I don't believe you. There are limits, even to what you would do.

BELLAIRS : I have seen very few limits to what you would do with me. If you wish us to try each other out . . . Ah, here is Scrope (*as the door opens*), with the wherewithal to wish us joy. No, it's Matilda (*as she walks in*). Happily Mr. Scrope as well (*as he follows*). We have been making good use of our time in your absence (*generally*). Wedding bells—after certain tiresome preliminaries—

DIANA : Mat ! (*springing up*). I didn't think you could be so lost to shame—(*going towards SCROPE*).

BELLAIRS : Marriage called shame ? In the presence of a representative of the Church ? I'm surprised at you, Diana. But if anybody knows just cause or impediment—

DIANA : Why these persons— ? (*drawing SCROPE's arm through her own*).

BELLAIRS : Tch ! . . . I am delighted to have brought about this public demonstration. Of course I knew all about it from the first, and have only been waiting for a favourable moment. A thousand felicitations, my dear Scrope (*going to take his hand*). If only you knew the pleasures in store for you ! You will before long.

SCROPE : Thank you, my dear Bellairs. In point of fact, I was not sure until this moment—

BELLAIRS : Whether Diana would take you ? There is no doubt about it now !

SCROPE : Do I owe it to you that she has made up her mind ?

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : With Diana holding you tight, I tremble to think of what you will owe to me. You and I, Matilda, must have a reckoning with Diana. If you are determined to come back to me—

MATILDA : But who has said that I have any intention of coming back ?

BELLAIRS : Who has said— ? God bless my soul ! Are we to believe, Diana, that all this has been—I really cannot choose my expressions—a put up job ?

DIANA : Certainly not. Won't you speak, Matilda ?

MATILDA (*as they spread out a little*) : I imagine, Diana, that you have been going a little beyond the book. I will come to the point quickly, Matthew ; a taxi has just drawn up, and Mr. Scrope tells me it will be Dorothy.

BELLAIRS : Which reminds me : I don't think you and Mr. Scrope have been introduced. Superfluous, since you have met in a public house ; I don't know what you will think of each other's habits !

MATILDA : I know yours. Well Matthew, my father *did* want me to return to you, and tried to compel me. I am not at all the woman, however, to do anything against my will ; which very possibly you may remember.

BELLAIRS : If you had always refrained from doing things against *my* will— !

MATILDA : That's long ago, and I know better now. I thought when listening to my father, in what might have been his last moments, that I might have to make a show of reconciliation, for Dorothy's sake.

BELLAIRS : Here *is* Dorothy—with Giovanni (*as they come in together*). Had we better keep the young people out for a few minutes ?

MATILDA : No, Dorothy may as well hear the rest. How are you, Dorothy ? Don't interrupt me now ; you can kiss me presently. In case we had to fall in with my father's wishes, Matthew, I sent Diana to prepare you—

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Tch ! So she told me.

MATILDA : It might have been necessary for you to come north, to reassure the Canon. But as soon as I was alone with him (*glancing at DIANA*), I began to make him see things in another light. I have got used to my way of living, and nothing could induce me to alter it.

BELLAIRS : My early influence—not in vain !

MATILDA : So I represented to my father that I was very well established in Rome, and had no need at all for his money ; in fact, I positively declined it.

BELLAIRS : Excuse a word—was this rash ?

MATILDA : From your point of view, no doubt : if you had any thoughts of sharing it.

BELLAIRS : No, no, no. An interjection merely.

MATILDA : Well, my father was persuaded ; he will leave all his fortune to Dorothy, on her coming of age.

DOROTHY : To me ? Oh, Giovanni ! (*clasp ing him in her arms*).

MATILDA : So you see your fate will be in your own hands, Dorothy, in three years' time. If you still care for Giovanni then . . . as I made my own bed, you will make yours. Meanwhile, you may be engaged to Giovanni, if you like ; and if Diana will continue to look after you— ?

DIANA : Of course I will.

BELLAIRS : Better, let us hope, than up to now !

MATILDA : And that's about all, I think. If, when I get to be an old woman, Dorothy, I should ever come to want—

DOROTHY : You won't—you won't ! And we shall come and stay with you in Rome, and everything will be lovely—and—and—

BELLAIRS : And the time has come for me to make the speech appropriate to a father ! But first, if Mr. Scrope has executed a little commission I entrusted him with— ?

SCROPE : Here you are, Bellairs (*diving into his tail pocket*) ; Ally Sloper, you see.

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS: You overwhelm me with your kindness (*taking a bottle*). If you will all excuse me for two moments while I run into the kitchen—water, glasses—(*he hurries out*).

MATILDA: I'm afraid you came near to making a terrible mess of things, Diana (*shaking her head at her, as DOROTHY and GIOVANNI go aside*).

DIANA: But it has all turned out beautifully—as I knew it would.

MATILDA: I shall continue in your debt. You won't mind that?

DIANA: There has never been any debt.

MATILDA: So you are going to be married, after all! I have heard a good deal about you, Mr. Scrope. Forgive me for not at once offering my congratulations—

SCROPE: Not at all. I am only too grateful to Mr. Bellairs—

[BELLAIRS *returns with a tray*.]

BELLAIRS: Here we are! You had the cork drawn, I see Scrope. Thoughtful man. If you will hold the tray while I pour out—everybody must join in (*as they group about him*). No denials! (*As DIANA and MATILDA shake their heads*). You will at least go through the motions of drinking. Don't be afraid of waste—I will empty the glasses myself afterwards. Are we all ready? I beg you will not embarrass me with too audible an emotion. I call on you to wish happiness to the two couples that will be; for 'tis love, 'tis love that makes the world go round. I drink—in heartfelt satisfaction that I am now enabled to drink—to Diana, Scrope, Dorothy and Giovanni; and last but not least to the Good Angels of you all whom you see before you in the persons of myself and Matilda. May we long remember the words of the poet, which if not so elegant as they might be, have in this superficial age the rare merit of sincerity—

Come where the booze is cheaper,

Come where the pots hold more!

In short—(*he buries his face in his glass*).

BELLAIRS

MATILDA (*as glasses are put down*): If you will now allow me—I have had a fatiguing three days, and am fresh from a journey—I will send Giovanni to get me a taxi. You go too Dorothy (*they slip out*). I have heard, Diana, of your good offices in the matter of this young woman, Betty Barclay.

BELLAIRS: Good offices! Call it officious, by all means—

MATILDA: Well, I'm not sure I wouldn't use that word too, Matthew. If you choose to amuse yourself, that's your affair. I felt I had to get her away while we cleared things up; but I took the opportunity of reassuring her, and told her to come back when we had all gone.

BELLAIRS: Tch! Do you hear that, Diana?

DIANA: Really, Matilda!

MATILDA: I can't help the world, my dear; and I am long past trying to help Matthew.

BELLAIRS: And now Diana is disposed of, she will have no pretext for helping me either. A rapturous peace descends upon me. I wish I could pass some of it on to you, Scrope. As for Betty—(*a last knock on the door*). Has she already taken you at your word, Matilda? (*going to the door*). My dear Mr. Barclay! (*inviting him in*). We were just speaking of what by the mysterious processes of nature is the fruit of your loins.

BARCLAY (*on the threshold*): Sorry to intrude. I saw you go by m'am (*to DIANA*); respects to you, sir (*touching his forehead to SCROPE*); and as Betty's over there to look after the bar, I thought I'd save you the trouble of coming again into my place—if you were going to.

DIANA: I *was* coming to see you again, Mr. Barclay. Thank you for making it unnecessary.

BARCLAY (*looking at MATILDA*): Didn't I see you talking to Betty, m'am? Is this between ourselves, Mr. Bellairs?

BELLAIRS: Certainly. I have no secrets from my wife.

BARCLAY: Well (*clearing his throat*); you know your own business best. You see, it's this way (*with some difficulty*).

BELLAIRS

BELLAIRS : Take your time. Sit down.

BARCLAY : Thank you, I'd as lief stand. As I was saying to Mr. Bellairs here this morning, m'am (*to DIANA*), a public is not what it was. We don't need to go into any unpleasantness about Betty—assuming there is any—I make no admissions about that.

BELLAIRS : Excellent man.

BARCLAY : But what I was going to say was this. Betty doesn't want any assistance from you, m'am ; but that's no reason why I, on the side as you may say—

BELLAIRS : Tch ! Tom Tiddler's ground—for everybody except Tom.

DIANA : Go on, Mr. Barclay.

BARCLAY : Beg your pardon, sir (*to SCROPE*). No need to say anything to the parson of this parish ? Might get out, and spoil the sale. You understand me ?

SCROPE : I'm trying to.

BELLAIRS : What's this about a sale ?

BARCLAY : I'm coming to that. Me and Betty's been talking things over this afternoon. Betty's idea is—and it's a comfort to me, as a father, to find her taking a good look forward—

BELLAIRS : I wish you would *get* forward, my dear Mr. Barclay.

BARCLAY : So I will. You see, mine's a free house ; one of the few of them left. There'll be good will, and fittings. One way and another it will mean a tidy sum—start Betty fair with her tea shop.

BELLAIRS : Tea shop ?

BARCLAY : It's the tendency of the times, ladies and gents. People don't know how to drink nowadays—making an exception of you, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : I'm very glad you *do* make an exception.

BARCLAY : We're in for a period of morality and sobriety (*with a hiccup*) ; what Mr. Bellairs calls the decline of our civilisation. Now Betty, you see, she wants to make a clean cut : go somewhere where she can start fresh, and marry some young fellow

BELLAIRS

with guts to him (*his eye turning slowly on BELLAIRS*). Less of 'em, maybe, but younger. Like what I was at five and twenty. I'm getting old, m'am (*to DIANA*), but I shall be the handy man on the job for a few years yet ; and if I can see Betty set up on her own, I shall sit down with no concern for the future. What I wanted to say to you, m'am, was, that if you feel like doing anything for Betty, and seeing as how she'll not take it herself, there's always me. Any time I can call on you, if not too much of a liberty—

DIANA : I shall be happy to see you, Mr. Barclay. I am very glad to know that Betty is taking such a wise course, and that you will support her in it.

BELLAIRS : It's very plain that Betty will support Mr. Barclay in it—in a more material sense.

BARCLAY : Thank you kindly. It's quite understood, sir (*to SCROPE*), that nothing's said hereabouts ?

SCROPE : Quite understood !

BARCLAY : Then I'll get back to my bar. Glad to see you there when you're free, Mr. Bellairs.

BELLAIRS : You will indeed see me. Gather we roses while we may. And will you tell Betty that I never heard such nonsense ?

BARCLAY : Didn't you then ? Seeing'll be believing, perhaps (*he turns to open the door*). Excuse me (*backing to admit DOROTHY and GIOVANNI, then going out*).

DOROTHY : Taxi's waiting.

MATILDA : Good night, Matthew. I'll come and see you again before I return to Italy.

BELLAIRS : Do ! A little talk about old times—

MATILDA : I want you two to come with me (*to DOROTHY and GIOVANNI*), and tell me all about yourselves. Say good night to your father, Dorothy (*she approaches DIANA, while DOROTHY and GIOVANNI go to BELLAIRS*). I shall have no scruple, my dear, in asking you still to keep an eye on my husband . . .

BELLAIRS

DOROTHY : Good night, Daddy (*kissing him*). I think Miss Martin's horrid. I shall come and see you every day ; you *shan't* be left alone !

BELLAIRS : Is a new persecution beginning ? Take her away, Giovanni, and occupy all her time (*he accompanies them to the door, where they meet MATILDA*). Only two now left, and then—! Mind the step—sleep well, Matilda (*they go out together*).

DIANA : Well, Mat ? (*as BELLAIRS returns*).

BELLAIRS : I hope you are satisfied. See me, a subject of unpardonable freedoms, a butt for tasteless jokes ; bald and fat, with other distressing particulars known only to the object of your moral solicitude ; such a man, cared for, comforted, amused through the hours of darkness ; boarded, washed, fed by a young person who was intelligent enough to find love among the ruins—do you expect me to call this well ?

DIANA : Give me my things, Mortimer. If I stay any longer . . . in spite of myself . . . oh, Mat !—is all this going to hit you hard ?

SCROPE (*hastily*) : I have your bag and umbrella, Diana. I will wait for you outside (*he goes out*).

BELLAIRS : Tactful Scrope ! There's only one thing that could hit me hard, Diana ; that is, if you ceased to be the fascinating woman you are. Don't keep Scrope waiting. And Lord preserve me ! . . . don't come again for a long time.

DIANA : Promise me one thing : if you find yourself in any real need—

BELLAIRS : Promise ?—after all you have learnt of my character ? Make it twenty pounds to be going on with, and I will positively send you a picture. Don't cross the cheque.

DIANA : Show me where the door is. My eyes . . .

BELLAIRS : There, there (*wiping her eyes*). Good soul, Diana, at bottom. I mean, the seat of the affections—dear me, the pitfalls of language ! Now please, do go. God bless you !

BELLAIRS

DIANA (*pulling herself together*) : You can't be best man, Mat ; you are, I think, the very worst. You will have to be the bride's father, and give me away.

BELLAIRS : As if you could ever fail to give yourself away !

DIANA : Good bye (*she follows SCROPE*).

BELLAIRS : Thank goodness, that's over.

[*He stands looking out ; then leaving the door open, comes down to the table thoughtfully. There, the glasses call him to himself. He laughs, and lifting one of the untouched glasses, empties it. BETTY appears in the doorway.*]

BETTY : Enjoying yourself ?

BELLAIRS : (*turning*) : It's you, is it ? (*shaking his fist at her*). What's all this about a tea shop ?

BETTY : Well—there's time yet. I'll get on with the dinner.

CURTAIN.

GOD'S AMATEUR

GOD'S AMATEUR

Characters, in the order of their appearance :

ROSA WADE
POPPY MILES
STEPHEN WADE
BILL TODD
MRS. WADE
MR. WADE
ELSPETH WADE
MARTHA WADE
PAMELA WINFORD
VINCENT EDGEWARE
MAY WARDOUR
A PARLOUR MAID

Scenes : Acts One and Two, Chambers in the Temple, London
Act Three, Scene 1, in the Black Forest ; Scenes 2 and 3,
a suburban interior, near Manchester

Subject : a Story of Delayed Adolescence. The struggle of a provincial young man to find himself ; a conflict of aspirations and crude realities, under the weight of family inheritance : passages in the hero's life, showing how he entered into an unhappy marriage, sought escape in political idealism, turned to religion, and finally seduced by his own wife came back to where he started—the richer, one hopes, in experience.

ACT ONE

Living room of a set of chambers in the Temple, London. Windows at the back, with tops of trees visible through square panes of old glass. From the point of view of the audience, entrance to

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the chambers is on the right : by an inner door, with small vestibule beyond. On the left, with fireplace between, are two doors : the nearer that of a bedroom, the farther that of a kitchen. The room is pleasantly but not luxuriously furnished ; an antique bureau between the windows (on which stand one or two photographs), a gate-leg table in the centre (laid for tea), rail-backed chairs etc. Some prints of eighteenth century London on the walls, and a number of books in plain white shelves where space permits. There is evidence of a recent occupant in a man's overcoat thrown over the back of a chair in the right hand far corner. As the curtain rises, an electric bell rings, then rings again. Presently the door on the right is opened hesitatingly from without and a girl looks into the room.

THE GIRL (*calling*) : Stephen ! (*Receiving no answer, she takes a step forward, looking round*). Nobody here, Poppy (*to another girl behind her*). He can't be far away, with both doors unfastened. Perhaps he's in one of the other rooms.

POPPY (*in the doorway, a little awed by the place and the room*) : My ! They don't half do themselves well, these barristers. It's like your cheek, Rosa, walking in.

ROSA : Well, he's my brother, however little he may like to think of me as his sister. And he's not so much of a barrister as all that. He has only just been called.

POPPY : Called ? Called what ?

ROSA : To the Bar. I wonder whether he *is* in ?—it's not quite like him to forget locking the door. I'll go and see. Come on, and make yourself at home.

POPPY : Well brought up young man, your brother ; nothing to hide (*coming into the room, as ROSA moves to the left*).

ROSA : Oh, Stephen's an innocent (*knocking at the farther door and peeping in*). Kitchen. So was I, before the great deliverance (*tapping at the nearer door*).

POPPY : Family row ?

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ROSA (*looking in*): He's out, all right (*closing the door and coming to POPPY*). Let's take the opportunity, and look round.

POPPY: Won't he throw us out when he comes back?

ROSA: I don't care if he does. But he's not a bad sort; he only wants somebody to seduce him. A chance for you, Poppy.

POPPY: Seems to be no chance for me: I've got no temperament . . . I never knew you had a brother—and one like this.

ROSA: I'm the skeleton in the cupboard, my dear (*moving towards the bureau*). I daresay you come from a cottage with climbing roses, if the truth were known.

POPPY: No such luck; mine was a basement in Bloomsbury.

ROSA (*lifting a photograph*): Hallo, what's this?

POPPY (*going to look over her shoulder*): Some vamp!

ROSA (*reading an inscription*): Stephen, from Pamela.

POPPY: Bang goes my chance.

ROSA: These clothes are Paris . . . Now, who's Pamela?

POPPY: There's others (*looking at the top of the bureau*). Who's this? (*lifting another photograph*).

ROSA (*glancing at it*): That's my mother.

POPPY: Doesn't seem to go with Pamela.

ROSA: Put it down (*knitting her brows over PAMELA*). Left out for everybody to see . . . Dress of three or four years ago. That means she's older than she makes out. Do you see her left hand?

POPPY: What about it?

ROSA: Wedding ring.

POPPY: Sleuth! I shouldn't like to have you let loose on my premises—if there was anything to keep dark.

ROSA: Well, that's Pamela (*replacing the photograph*). What else?

POPPY: You're not going to open drawers?

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ROSA : Oh, no : just what's lying about, damn him (*with an air of injury and jealousy*). Something might have been done for me, if Aunt Lena hadn't put all her eggs into one basket.

POPPY : Meaning ?

ROSA : The one boy of the family ; and we girls— !

POPPY : Why, hadn't you a good home, and all that ?

ROSA : Yes, to stay in for evermore. In Withington !

POPPY : Where's Withington ?

ROSA : Manchester.

POPPY : Oh, you're from Lancashire ? Nobody 'd ever know.

ROSA : I've done my best to cover my tracks.

POPPY : You're a close one. What's made you drag *me* in ?

ROSA : Sudden impulse—meeting you in the Strand. On my way to see Stephen : the third or fourth time. I've always thought better of it before. Re-appearance of the erring sister, you know. I thought you'd help to stiffen me up, make me go through with it. And give him an extra one in the eye, if he turned out nasty.

POPPY : Here, I'm virtuous, if as much can't be said for you.

ROSA : Sorry, Poppy ; I didn't mean that. I don't quite know what I did mean.

POPPY : Cheerioh, I know the feeling (*trying one of the chairs*). What a lot of books ! (*looking round the room*).

ROSA : Something to go upon there, perhaps (*walking to shelves*) ; look at what a man's reading and you find his mind. What's the latest phase ?—he's always gone through phases (*looking at books*).

POPPY : People coming to tea (*getting up to look at the table*).

ROSA : Yes—have you only just noticed that ? It's the whole loving family.

POPPY : What ? (*startled*). I don't mind a man or two, but I'm waiting for no family.

ROSA : Don't be afraid ; they're not due for an hour yet.

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POPPY : How do you know ?

ROSA : I've a sister who still writes to me. They're coming up for a beano on Stephen's being through with his studies—Westminster Abbey, National Gallery.

POPPY : Call that a beano !

ROSA : *They* do. "What a shame, Rosa, you can't be one of us !" Well, I've come, all the same.

POPPY : Expecting to be asked to stay ?

ROSA : Just to see. And then say I won't. Silly, isn't it ?

POPPY : You've got it bad. I'm off.

ROSA : He's left his coat here (*pausing before the coat on the chair*). That's not like Stephen : a place for everything, and everything in its place. (*She picks up the coat*). Stouter than when I saw him last. Stephen putting on flesh ? Ah, here's a name on the label . . . (*sudden silence*).

POPPY (*going to her*) : What's the matter now ?

ROSA : Funny, that . . . (*she puts down the coat, wanders to the nearer window, sits abruptly*).

POPPY : Are you feeling faint ?

ROSA : No hat. That means . . .

POPPY : The coat, was it ? (*after a glance at ROSA, she picks up the coat and reads the name*) : William Todd.

ROSA : Bill . . .

POPPY : Voice from the long-lost home ? (*dropping the coat and going to ROSA*).

ROSA : Let's get out of this (*standing*).

POPPY : Dear old Bill !—make it up with him and get married. I wish *I* could. If nothing turns up soon I shall have to go back into service.

ROSA : He must have stepped out with Stephen ; they'll be back in a minute—that's the explanation of the open door. They may be on the stairs now !

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POPPY : I'll look out and see ; we could go up to the next floor—

ROSA : No, I'm damned if I will ! Go away, Poppy, and leave me to it.

POPPY : Hurray, that's talking. Don't forget me when you're set up in life !

ROSA : Forgive me ! I oughtn't to have brought you. You're taking it like an angel.

POPPY : Oh, go on. No sob-stuff for me (*making for the door*).

ROSA (*following*) : Are you still living at the same place ?

POPPY : Same old place, but under the tiles. A week or two more and I shall join the sparrows on the roof.

ROSA : I'll come and see you. I've still a little to go on with.

POPPY : But you never blued it in. Don't begin now, tempting me from my natural end. There's always Piccadilly Circus.

ROSA : Don't !

POPPY : Never fear. I say that to myself for an awful warning. Give me a proper Catholic marriage, or this girl stays a virgin.

ROSA : Are you— ? I didn't know.

POPPY : Catholic ? R.C. you'd call it (*in the vestibule*). Doll yourself up a bit, and take a chance with Bill (*she closes the outer door after her*).

[*The inner door remains open. ROSA, moving to the nearer window, opens her bag and looks at her face. Sitting there, she has begun to follow POPPY's advice when the outer door opens and men's voices come from the vestibule. She gets up hastily, and slipping along by the windows, goes through the farther door on the left.*]

FIRST VOICE : Come on, Bill. What has a fellow of your character to do with a girl like that ? (*as the other lingers, looking back*).

BILL : She looked as though she knew us, and winked as she went down the stairs.

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FIRST VOICE : Not impossible, even in the Temple. Come in, and shut the door.

[The two men enter, the first a slim, good-looking man dressed by a London tailor ; the second a thick-set, shorter man with some stigmata of the north.]

BILL (*closing the inner door and fixing the first man with his eye*) : More might be going on in the Temple, Stephen, than a man would think.

STEPHEN : What *do* you think ?

BILL : Oh, nothing (*throwing his hat down on his coat in the corner*). If we hadn't met your friend in the Court down there, I might have fancied that girl on the stairs had been looking for you.

STEPHEN : Well, she hadn't—that's quite certain. What do you think of Pamela ? Out with it, Bill !

BILL : What did you say her name was ?—not Pamela, I got that. Surname.

STEPHEN : Winford (*then, distinctly*), Mrs. Lestrangle Winford.

BILL : Thanks. Widow, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : No.

BILL (*shrugging his shoulders*) : Fine woman.

STEPHEN : Go on.

BILL : Look here, Steve. I've nothing to do with your friends. What are you prodding me like this for ?

STEPHEN : It looked a little odd, didn't it—when she was coming to see me, my sending her away like that ?

BILL : She didn't seem to like it, if that's what you mean.

STEPHEN : No, I didn't mean that. My sending her away when the family are expected (*pointing to the table*). That's what may have seemed a little—pointed.

BILL : Well, if you insist. What's up, Steve—anything queer ?

STEPHEN : Nothing out of the way. But you know the family.

BILL : Very good family too. You don't appreciate them (*taking a chair*).

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STEPHEN : Oh yes, I do. But the best appreciation of one's family is to get out of it.

BILL : So you say. I did what I could to get into it, you know.

STEPHEN : My dear Bill ! I didn't mean to say anything to hurt you. So long ago now. But it was tactless of me.

BILL : Don't apologise. You know me : broad in the back and hard in the grain. Manchester man. What beats me is how you have shed your skin.

STEPHEN : Think Manchester, be Manchester. I don't—that's all. What's the dear old horror like nowadays ?

BILL : Getting on nicely, respects to London. I was trying to ask you something when we met your friend.

STEPHEN : So you were (*with a smile*). The Law.

BILL : What are the prospects : soon be coming out strong ?

STEPHEN : Perhaps.

BILL : Ump.

STEPHEN : Expressive.

BILL : So was all your talk out there about the history and architecture of the Temple ; you wouldn't let me get a word in on what it stands for—as your profession. Afraid of the subject ?

STEPHEN : I am turning it over.

BILL : These chambers—five years of study !

STEPHEN : I have to get things straight.

BILL : And like most men who wait to get things straight, you begin by going crooked.

STEPHEN : It's how we're made, Bill : like the carrier pigeons, round and round till we get our bearings.

BILL : Well, if you are for high flights. Some of us have to plod along on the ground. Have you told your father ?

STEPHEN : Do you think he would understand ? When the decision is made I shall tell him, of course ; I don't want to upset them with doubts. They ought to be here soon (*looking at his watch*). Would you like to wash ?

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BILL : I may as well (*rising*).

STEPHEN : You know, Bill, I've been a disappointment to them—my mother especially. I made up my mind to go through with my law studies. Don't you think I may owe it to myself now—

BILL : To throw it all away ?

STEPHEN : Nothing is thrown away. It takes us—how long ?—to learn what we really are, and what the world is.

BILL : Most men get taught early with a club. Do you know who your bad angel was ?

STEPHEN : Who ?

BILL : Your Aunt Lena. You ought to have been hoofed into the street when you left school.

STEPHEN : Ought is not helpful.

BILL : Come off it, Steve. You've had a long run since we ate buns together. Time for something final.

STEPHEN : That may not be very far away. Let me get through with this afternoon . . . But come and wash.

[*As they turn to go into the bedroom, ROSA comes out of the kitchen.*]

ROSA : Sorry, Stephen.

STEPHEN : Good God—Rosa !

ROSA : How do you do, Bill ?

BILL (*a face of wood*) : Very well, thank you, Rosa.

STEPHEN : But how did you get here ?—why— !

ROSA : There was no answer when I rang. I tried the door. As it wasn't fastened, we came in.

STEPHEN : We ?

ROSA : My friend Poppy Miles. She's gone.

STEPHEN : The girl on the stairs . . .

ROSA : Aren't you glad to see me ?

STEPHEN : But was it necessary to hide ?

ROSA : I was doing my face. As I was going to see Bill again—

STEPHEN : How could you know ?

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ROSA : The overcoat. Is that enough by way of explanation ?

STEPHEN : Yes, surely . . .

ROSA : Then can we begin to be brother and sister ?

STEPHEN : My dear Rosa ! Of course I am glad to see you. Why have you never been before ? You know I don't share the family view. I stood up for you.

ROSA : I was going to show you all what I could do on my own account.

BILL (*bluntly*) : What have you done ?

ROSA : Nothing much, Bill. There are too many like you about.

BILL : Temper ?

ROSA : Well, yes—a little. I don't care for the reception.

STEPHEN (*gently*) : Rosa ! Did Bill care for the rejection ?

ROSA : Honest, Bill—you cared ?

BILL : I did.

ROSA : We might have written—one or the other.

BILL : And did not.

ROSA : Did not. You asked why I came, Stephen. I had a kind of longing. Blood thicker than water—that sort of thing.

STEPHEN : Any sort of thing that brings you to me (*but glancing at the table*).

ROSA : I know ; you are expecting the others. That's why I came.

STEPHEN : Of course . . . I'm glad. But since it's not likely that the old people have changed—what's the spirit you will meet them in ?

ROSA : Good bye, then ; I won't spoil your party.

STEPHEN : Oh, please, Rosa ! It's only that I want to do all I can—

ROSA : What can you do ? Do you think I want to go home with them, the repentant sinner ?

STEPHEN : No, no. But if I knew what there was to be gained—

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ROSA : What about you, Bill ?

BILL : What about me.

ROSA : Do you need to be told the spirit ?

BILL : I don't think I do.

ROSA : What is it ?

BILL : Just young-womanish jealousy and spite.

ROSA : Well, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Rosa ! Isn't this unkind, uncalled-for ?

ROSA : Give him your advice, Bill.

BILL : If you want it, Stephen, my advice is, Throw her out.

ROSA (*offering* STEPHEN *her arm*) : I'll go quietly.

STEPHEN (*backing*) : No, no, no !

BILL : Take mine, Rosa ? (*offering his arm*).

ROSA : Almost like old times, isn't it (*taking his arm*).

BILL (*to* STEPHEN) : I shan't be missed. See you again later.

STEPHEN : Bill ! I can't let you go like this—either of you.

ROSA : No ? Are thoughts of your own erring steps beginning to work ?

STEPHEN : My own— ?

ROSA : "Stephen from Pamela". Unless you are secretly married. Oh ! (*as* BILL *twitches her arm*).

BILL : Behave yourself.

STEPHEN : Let go her arm, Bill.

BILL : It's for you to say, Rosa.

ROSA (*disengaging her arm and going to* STEPHEN) : Slap my face ?

STEPHEN : You rather deserve it, you know. Perhaps you will think better of this if I leave you for a little with Bill. I must go to put on the kettle. Don't let her go away, Bill. I'll be back in a few minutes. (*He goes into the kitchen*).

BILL : Pleasant sister, aren't you. Considerate.

ROSA : Wouldn't you—in my place—

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BILL : High horse, come a cropper. Sit down and do as you're told : think better of it. (*He places a chair for her*).

ROSA (*sitting*) : Talk to me.

BILL : I will (*sitting before her*). Was it all your fancy painted ?

ROSA : Suppose we come up to date.

BILL : Let sleeping dogs lie ?

ROSA : Yes. They might bite.

BILL : What are you doing now, then ?

ROSA : Nothing.

BILL : Doesn't seem much in nothing.

ROSA : No : only everything.

BILL : Earned your living ?

ROSA : So far.

BILL : Keeping straight ?

ROSA : Brute.

BILL : Anything to ask me ?

ROSA : Are you married ?

BILL : No.

ROSA : Engaged ?

BILL : No.

ROSA : Done with women ?

BILL : Till I've made some money.

ROSA : Are you making it ?

BILL : Not so bad.

ROSA : The old job ?

BILL : On my own.

ROSA : That's good.

BILL : Well ?

ROSA : Are you starting up again, Bill ?

BILL : There'd be a lot to know first.

ROSA : Do you think you'll ever know it ?

BILL : Can't say. Where are you living ?

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ROSA : That's my business.

BILL : Is it ? Just as you like.

ROSA : Tell me : do you expect me to be ashamed of myself ?

BILL : Anything to be ashamed of ?

ROSA : No. Unless it was how I treated you.

BILL : No need to drag that in. I can take care of myself.

ROSA : So I see.

BILL : It's a pretty rough world. I'd have kept you out of it if you had let me.

ROSA : I wanted to be in it.

BILL : May I ask you one more question ?

ROSA : Try.

BILL : Have you anything to do with him still ?

ROSA : That's easy. He's dead.

BILL (*after a start and a pause*) : I'm sorry, Rosa. We none of us heard of that. When was it ?

ROSA : Six months after I ran away with him. Ancient history.

BILL : Not so much as a line to me, Rosa ?

ROSA : Had I ever one from you ?

BILL : There was the other fellow. So I thought . . .

ROSA : Pride—both sides.

BILL : Had enough of it ?

ROSA : That will do (*rising*). Now fetch in Stephen. He's been giving us a chance. And I'll say goodbye.

BILL : You're not going to make trouble for him, then, with the family ? (*at her side*).

ROSA : No ; I never meant to, really.

BILL : I'm glad to hear it. And as you are going, I'm going too.

ROSA : Not with me.

BILL : Yes, with you.

ROSA : Oh no, you are not.

BILL : How will you stop me ?

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ROSA : I ask you not to.

BILL : No use.

ROSA : Please, Bill !

BILL : I've lost you once.

ROSA : You're going the way to lose me again.

BILL : How ? The reason !

ROSA : What has kept us strangers these past seven years ?

BILL : Pride ?

ROSA : Pride. Have you forgotten yours ?

BILL : Looks rather like it (*withdrawing into himself*). Who's to make the next move ?

ROSA : I am—if there's to be any move at all (STEPHEN *re-enters*). I'm going, Stephen. Will you please prevent Bill from following me ?

STEPHEN : No, you mustn't go, Rosa. What's this about Bill ?

BILL : Nothing (*going to pick up his hat and coat*). Goodbye, Steve (*returning with his hand out*).

STEPHEN : But I can't have this—

BILL : I'm going up north to-night. See you again when I'm next in London.

STEPHEN : What's happened ?

BILL : Has anything happened, Rosa ?

ROSA : Only Lancashire, Bill.

BILL : I'll be getting back there, then. You know where to find me ?

ROSA : If I should want to.

BILL : That's all right. Stick it, Stephen (*making a gesture with his hat at the door*).

STEPHEN (*following to the door*) : Bill !

BILL : My own affair ; look after yours (*he goes out*).

STEPHEN (*turning to Rosa*) : What's the meaning of it all ?

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ROSA : Two very stubborn people. Bill's got ahead of me. I'll wait till he'll be out of sight, and then go.

STEPHEN : Well, well! (*dropping into a chair and ruffling his head, half humorously, half in vexation*). One thing on top of another.

ROSA : Own troubles, brother ? (*approaching*).

STEPHEN : Lots of them.

ROSA : Tell me ?

STEPHEN : What's the use . . . (*falling into thought*).

ROSA : Baa, baa, Black Sheep—you and me.

STEPHEN : Black as she's painted, Rosa ? (*taking her hand kindly*).

ROSA : Is Pamela ?

STEPHEN (*drawing back*) : I was speaking of you.

ROSA : And I of you. Mother's photograph, too, in the same room !

STEPHEN : You are very ready to jump to conclusions.

ROSA : Because I've noticed that somebody is jumpy on the subject. Confidences ? Don't you think I may be qualified ?

STEPHEN : Why should Pamela's photograph be there for everyone to see, if it were a case for confidences ?

ROSA : I don't know. You might be proud of it. Men like you often are—at first.

STEPHEN : You've quite made up your mind about me, first and last ?

ROSA : I think so. As you began, so you'll end. Bill must be well away by this time. Goodbye. Will you get rid of Pamela so easily ?

STEPHEN : You're maddening.

ROSA : And I'm only a sister ! Your kettle must be boiling over. Only one word, brother, and you've seen the last of me. Turn down the gas !

STEPHEN : If you *want* me to send you away—! (*rising*). Who are you, to be jeering like this ?

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ROSA : Ah, got you ! I'm a knowing one, Stephen. She hasn't that face for nothing. Poor ? Dressed on tic ?

STEPHEN : How should I know whether she's poor or not, or how she dresses ! Yes, she is poor. Is it a crime ?

ROSA : It would be in you. But thanks to Aunt Lena—(*the bell rings*). The family ! (*with a change of tone*).

STEPHEN : Re-united !

ROSA : Can't I get away ?

STEPHEN : Of course you can't.

ROSA : I meant to have gone. Put it all on me ; wasn't your doing. I'll behave—trust me. I've been a beast to you ; try to understand !

STEPHEN : Never mind (*moving to the door*). I wouldn't have turned you down in any case.

ROSA : I've asked for it (*putting her back to the window*).

STEPHEN (*in the vestibule*) : Mother ! And you, Father. Elspeth and Martha ! Come in.

HIS MOTHER : Dear Stephen !

[STEPHEN and MRS. WADE come first into the room, MRS. WADE hanging on his arm and looking into his face. They are followed by MR. WADE, a tall, reserved man with grey hair, and by ELSPETH and MARTHA, some years older than their brother, and marked for ever as provincial, especially MARTHA. The sisters see Rosa instantly, and freeze by the door, ELSPETH in pain, MARTHA in anger. WADE, looking at STEPHEN, for the moment sees nothing else.]

WADE : Congratulations, Stephen : by word of mouth, after our letter.

MRS. WADE : And tea laid, all beautifully. Why— ? (*stopping suddenly as she sees Rosa*).

WADE : Who is this ? (*putting up eyeglasses*).

ROSA (*in the window*) : How do you do, Mother ?

MRS. WADE (*with a cry*) : Rosa !

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WADE : Who ? (*looking from ROSA to STEPHEN*).

STEPHEN : My sister, sir ; your youngest daughter.

ELSPETH : Rosa ! (*in startled fear*).

MARTHA : Rosa ! (*in extreme indignation*).

WADE : Keep back, girls.

MRS. WADE : Stephen ! You might have warned me—

ROSA (*advancing*) : He couldn't. He didn't know I was coming.
He was just sending me away when you rang.

STEPHEN : That's not true, Rosa.

WADE : The door is open, Stephen ; or must I take your sisters—

STEPHEN : Rosa is one of them.

MRS. WADE : No, no—don't let her go ! Oh, Stephen !
(WADE *takes her arm and puts her into a chair*).

ROSA (*walking, not looking to right or left, to the door*) : Good afternoon.

STEPHEN : Stop, Rosa (*taking her hand*). I can't have her turned out, sir (*to WADE*). Her coming was none of my doing, but she's here.

WADE : Don't you see your mother ?

STEPHEN : Am I not doing right, Mother ?

MRS. WADE : Yes. I don't know. Oh dear, oh dear ! Arthur !
(*to WADE*).

WADE : Your mother will stay, Stephen. Come away, girls.

ELSPETH (*in rare rebellion*) : I won't go.

MARTHA : I will.

ROSA : Please let go my hand, Stephen.

STEPHEN : No, Rosa. Come with me (*drawing her to MRS. WADE's chair*). It's Rosa, Mother.

MRS. WADE : Oh, Rosa, Rosa, if you hadn't gone wrong !

WADE : You hear your mother, Rosa !

MRS. WADE : Oh, and we were so happy—

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ELSPETH : It's a shame, but there's only one thing to do (*she kisses ROSA, who stands like a stone*).

MARTHA : I'm ashamed of you, Elspeth.

STEPHEN : What am I to do, sir ? (*to WADE*). These are my chambers.

WADE : You are grown up. You will decide.

STEPHEN : I decide, then (*he embraces ROSA*).

ROSA (*breaking*) : Thank you, Stephen. I'll be your friend for this, through thick and thin (*she tears herself free and runs out, banging the outer door*).

MRS. WADE (*starting up to follow*) : Rosa !

WADE (*holding her*) : Grace !

MARTHA (*breaking out*) : And what do you think of yourself, Stephen—

WADE (*authoritatively*) : Martha !

ELSPETH : It was right.

WADE : Elspeth ! (*having them silent before him, he proceeds*). Now Stephen. I think you have acted in a manly way. You are not bound by my principles, but by your own. Rosa has shown good feeling in leaving us. I shall be glad to renew a link with her through you if she comes to you again, or you can tell me where she lives. I cannot have her under my own roof, or in contact with your sisters ; but if she needs my assistance, she may have it.

STEPHEN : I don't know where she lives—don't know anything about her that you do not.

MRS. WADE (*weeping*) : Oh, Rosa, Rosa.

WADE : There, there, Grace ; control yourself. Then, Stephen, we must leave her to make the next sign. You will tell her, furthermore, that as soon as she brings herself to ask my forgiveness—

STEPHEN : Surely, sir, in these days—

WADE (*weightily*) : In *no* days. We live in times when many people's hearts and thoughts have gone far astray. Nothing otherwise is changed ; and out of those family lives which are kept

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pure will come the recovery for which we must all pray. It may be admitted that there are many religions; there is only one morality.

STEPHEN: In the sphere of morality of *all* things—race, climate, inheritance—

WADE: I am not disputing with you, Stephen. I am willing to lay your present weakness to a generous, family affection. I was saying, that as soon as Rosa brings herself to ask my forgiveness, I shall arrange for her some permanent provision. You will tell her so. And now, if you will let your mother and me go into another room—

STEPHEN: There is only the bedroom (*indicating the door*).

WADE: That will do. Come, Grace, you must have a few minutes to put this painful scene out of your mind. Think of Stephen.

MRS. WADE: Rosa, Rosa . . . (*still sobbing, she is led by WADE into the bedroom*).

MARTHA (*to STEPHEN*): Coward!

ELSPETH: Could Stephen have helped it, Martha?

MARTHA: Of course he could have helped it. Poor mother!—for I suppose it's no use talking of common decency.

STEPHEN: Has Rosa ever done you any harm, Martha?

MARTHA: Personally, perhaps not. But it was a betrayal. You know, or ought to know, that people like us are the best to be found anywhere. Think what the servants must have thought, to go no further. If we don't show a solid front, to the lower classes on the one hand, and the so-called upper classes on the other—

STEPHEN: It gives the game away?

MARTHA: It does nothing of the sort. It is our plain duty to set a standard—

STEPHEN: Of breeding, justice, intellect, taste and mercy!

GOD'S AMATEUR

MARTHA : It's no use your trying to get out of it ; we *are* the standard. And everybody knows it, whether they admit it or not. And if anybody in one's own family pretends otherwise, it's only to cover their own wrong-doing, and it deceives nobody. I'm not one of those who put on a false modesty ; more harm is done by that sort of thing than by positive crime. There is one paramount obligation for people in our position ; and that is, uncompromisingly, to show the world how to live.

STEPHEN : Good lord ! A handful of provincials, left over—

ELSPETH : Haven't you outgrown argument, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Meaning, to let the others have it all their own way ? No, I have not outgrown argument, or something perhaps a little stronger.

MARTHA : I told you so ! First Rosa, and now you : this madness for leaving home—

ELSPETH (*protesting*) : Martha ! (*as STEPHEN walks angrily to the window*).

MARTHA : Look at Stephen, then ; hear him ! If this is what comes of Aunt Lena's money— ! But I see ; it's no good talking. I've said what had to be said. You've got to be pleasant, Stephen, for Mother's sake ; so come away from the window, and let us be smiling when she and Father come back. Calling Father Sir, too : as if you were above the way you were brought up. Is tea ready ? (*going to look at the table*).

STEPHEN : The kettle ! (*he goes hurriedly into the kitchen*).

MARTHA : What did you do with the cake ?

ELSPETH : I put it on the chair, there, by the door.

MARTHA : Open it, and we'll put it in the middle. (*She rearranges the table*). I don't think we shall like these (*examining some French confectionery provided by STEPHEN*). I suppose Stephen dines late every night now ; though what's the matter with high tea I've never been able to see. I daresay we are behind the times ; and if Father wasn't so conservative, I for one, would move for a change. Quite a lot of nice people are dining late now.

GOD'S AMATEUR

ELSPETH : How can you call Father conservative ! (*opening a parcel by the door*).

MARTHA : Oh, you know what I meant. Of course he's liberal in everything, not to say advanced. I wish he wasn't ; he sometimes makes me feel quite hot. Ruskin's all right if you know how to interpret him—

ELSPETH (*quietly*) : Making him mean everything *you* mean ?

MARTHA : Well, that's what he *does* mean. All great writers mean the same thing. Father's often said so. That looks better (*surveying the table*). What's Stephen such a long time for ? Getting over his temper, I hope.

ELSPETH : Here's the cake. Is there a plate ?

MARTHA : One of these will do. (*The door bell rings*). Who's that ? (*they look at each other*).

ELSPETH (*dismayed*) : Rosa ?

MARTHA : I shouldn't wonder ! We *can't* have it, Elspeth.

ELSPETH : What are we to do ?

MARTHA : I'll go to the door.

ELSPETH : Hadn't we better call Stephen ?

MARTHA : That's just what we musn't do. I'm thankful Mother is still in the other room (*she goes to open the door ; a visitor is in the vestibule*).

A WOMAN'S VOICE : Er—is Mr. Wade here ?

MARTHA : I—er—is he expecting you ?

THE VOICE : Er—yes. If I may see him for a moment. May I come in ? (MARTHA, *nonplussed, backs from the door ; a good-looking woman enters*). I expect you wonder who I am. You will be Mr. Wade's sisters ?

MARTHA : Yes.

THE WOMAN : I knew you were coming, and your father and mother (*looking round*). Mr. Wade will be bringing them soon ?

MARTHA : Who *are* you ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

THE WOMAN : A very natural question (*laughing sweetly*). I see you are getting tea ready. It looks delightfully domestic. I'm so glad. We shall be able to get to know one another before the others come.

MARTHA : Stephen *asked* you ?

THE WOMAN : I—er—haven't yet answered your first question. Oh, here *is* your brother (*as STEPHEN re-enters, carrying a tea-pot*).

STEPHEN : Pamela! . . . (*almost dropping the tea-pot*).

PAMELA (*to the others*) : There!—you see I am introduced, though rather informally. Won't you—er—Stephen—won't you come to my rescue ?

[STEPHEN *with trembling hands puts the teapot down on the table, watched in awful silence by MARTHA and ELSPETH*].

STEPHEN : This is my friend, Mrs. Winford. (*ELSPETH bows, MARTHA stands rigid*).

PAMELA : Is there anything awkward ?

STEPHEN : Is this fair ? (*to PAMELA*).

PAMELA : Very unfair, I'm afraid. The fact is . . . which am I to call Miss Wade ?

ELSPETH : I'm the elder.

PAMELA : The fact is, Miss Wade, that your brother asked me to come this afternoon to meet you all (*lying, with her eye on STEPHEN*). I said that *of course*, on your first gathering, after such a long time, I shouldn't be wanted. And then, do you know, I thought that after all . . . have I done wrong ? Won't you help me out, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Elspeth—Martha—(*struggling with the situation*).

MARTHA : Don't trouble about me ; I'll go to Father and Mother (*she walks stiffly into the bedroom*).

ELSPETH (*shrinking back*) : What does it mean, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Surely, Elspeth, when someone calls, there is no need—

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : But Miss Wade is quite right. This must look a little—er—unusual. If Stephen hadn't so impulsively called me Pamela ; or if, as I expected, he had himself opened the door to me . . . isn't that so ?

ELSPETH : Isn't what so ?

PAMELA : Why, he could have made me known to you in a regular way. Evidently, he has not yet told you . . . Had I better go, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : No, stay.

PAMELA : Are you angry with me ?

STEPHEN : A little.

ELSPETH : Is there anything I can do, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Shake hands with Mrs. Winford, for example ?

ELSPETH : I beg your pardon, Mrs. Winford (*offering her hand*).

PAMELA : The only pardon is to be begged by me. But need it be taken so solemnly ? Wouldn't it be nicer to smile ? I'm being hurt, Stephen.

STEPHEN : Sit down, and I'll call my parents in.

ELSPETH (*in alarm*) : Stephen ! Mother— !

STEPHEN : Mother, father, sisters, everybody. Speak the truth, and shame the devil.

ELSPETH : Oh ! (*she goes back and sits, covering her face*).

PAMELA (*becoming hard*) : Is that what you are going to do ?

STEPHEN : What is it you want, Pamela ?

PAMELA : Isn't it perfectly simple ?—that you shall take this opportunity of announcing to your family—

STEPHEN : It's to force my hand, then ?

PAMELA : For your own sake. Either your reputation is gone, or you will put things on a proper footing.

STEPHEN : A threat.

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : No, I should not say so. It's meant to bring you to your grown mind. Sacrifice me or not, as you please. You have gone a long way towards doing the first already, with your guilty manner to your friend in the court, and now this.

STEPHEN : I had reasons for delay—I told you. I wanted time.

PAMELA : Time to ruin your career. You are a man who will go to pieces unless someone pulls you up. I am doing my best for you. Be grateful !

STEPHEN : Best ! Grateful !

PAMELA : You brought it to a head by sending me away this afternoon. I walked down to the river and thought it over. And so—I came back.

STEPHEN : A loving, helpful thing to have done ?

PAMELA : Love is one thing ; life is another. Ah, we shall see (*as the bedroom door opens and WADE comes out*).

WADE : Leave us, Elspeth (*waiting till she has gone into the bedroom, and he has closed the door*). Introduce me to this lady, Stephen.

STEPHEN : Mrs. Winford—my father.

WADE : Is your husband living, Mrs. Winford ?

STEPHEN : Don't answer, Pamela, unless you wish.

PAMELA : But of course I wish to. He is living, Mr. Wade, but no longer my husband.

WADE : You have divorced him ?

PAMELA : We are divorced.

WADE : He has divorced you. May I ask what your interest is in my son ?

PAMELA : May he not have shown—an interest—in me ?

WADE : Have you, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Yes.

WADE : Will you tell me more ?

STEPHEN : I am sorry—No.

WADE : Perhaps you feel yourself bound in honour to be silent ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : That is not a question to be asked, sir.

WADE : Not of my own son ? . . . Mrs. Winford, will you tell me more ?

PAMELA : I would gladly tell you everything. But hasn't Stephen tied my tongue ?

WADE : It is a difficulty. Your mother and sisters are under your roof, Stephen ; there is no way out but through this room.

STEPHEN : May I take you away, Pamela ?

PAMELA : I think not. Not just yet.

STEPHEN : You are at full liberty to speak.

PAMELA : I am your son's mistress, Mr. Wade.

WADE (*speechless, bows*) : . . .

PAMELA : But in using so crude a word, I am putting the worst construction first. I do not defend the situation ; I am very much to blame. But will you let me say, Stephen, that there was an understanding ?

STEPHEN (*watched by WADE*) : There has been an understanding.

WADE : To do what honour demands ?

STEPHEN : If honour lay that way.

WADE : I must beg . . . you will be clearer. I know only one honourable course.

STEPHEN : I will take this one, sir : to explain to you as well as I can . . .

WADE : Do so.

STEPHEN : Will you sit down, Pamela, and stop me if you feel it necessary ?

PAMELA : We cannot be too open (*taking a chair, her eyes steadily upon him*).

STEPHEN : What Pamela said is true. If there is any blame, I take it upon myself. Marriage has been spoken of ; but I could not take such a step until a matter of much importance had been settled. Upon this matter there has been difference between us.

WADE : What matter ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : I should have told you, sir, in any event, before you left London. I wanted to put the case . . . uncomplicated by this other matter . . . that has arisen. Mrs. Winford has thought it best to make them one.

PAMELA : They are one.

WADE : Well, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : I have been in doubt whether to go on with the Law.

WADE : In *doubt* ?

PAMELA : May I say a word here, Mr. Wade ?

WADE : I am listening, Madam.

PAMELA : Your son has indeed asked me to be his wife, although he was under no obligation to do so. But as a responsible woman—which, believe me, I am trying to be—I could not see him throw away his future. I have made our engagement conditional upon his taking a recognised place in society. I had looked forward to to-day as the day on which he would reassure me about his career, and at the same time present me to his family. He has, to my sorrow, done neither. It has seemed to me that *my* only honourable course was not to let things drag on, but to come to you honestly—for your advice, and help . . . If I have done wrong—

WADE : You have done right. It is to *my* sorrow that my son has not seen fit to do as well. I may wish that you had written to me, so that I might have been here alone . . . but you have done right. Allow me to thank you.

PAMELA : Then there was my sad history (*looking down*), my own passionate fault with your son . . . I love Stephen, but he is not a man with much knowledge of the world. Better for me to break it off, like this . . . to go out of his life . . . if I cannot help him—and myself—to what alone makes for happiness.

WADE : You have heard, Stephen ? (*turning to him sternly*).

STEPHEN : And decided.

GOD'S AMATEUR

WADE: Wait! Before you utter such a word, listen to me. You began well. I had high hopes for you: a life under my own hand, in the business you would have inherited. Your aunt dying, you were given the power of choice. When you elected for the Ministry I had my misgivings, but you appeared to be sincere. That came to nothing.

STEPHEN: I ceased to believe.

WADE: And very properly drew back; though the lengths you went to, including a withdrawal from your natural home—but I will say nothing there. You went into the Law, and I recognise that you have gone through faithfully with your training. But on the very day that was to mark your entrance upon a serious pursuit—Was there no purpose in these five years that have gone by?

STEPHEN: Knowledge.

WADE: Of evil.

STEPHEN: Of good and evil.

WADE: In that day thou shalt surely die.

STEPHEN: I would not, on other terms, live.

WADE: There are those who might have taught you good—if you had listened.

STEPHEN: They could not.

WADE: And she—Mrs. Winford—could?

STEPHEN: She. And others.

WADE: What others?

STEPHEN (*fanatically*): No fewer than the whole world: the good, the bad, the indifferent. And at last, God.

WADE: Take care that God does not blast you in your pride—and through this woman!

STEPHEN (*calm, with an effort*): It seems we are parted.
(PAMELA *stands up*).

WADE: Do you take this as dismissal, Madam?

PAMELA: Upon my word, Mr. Wade: have I deserved “this woman” and such an expression as “dismissal”? It is I who have offered to break everything off.

GOD'S AMATEUR

WADE : And you will do so ?

PAMELA : Um—um (*musically, with half a smile at STEPHEN*). But has anything been settled ?

STEPHEN : This much, Pamela : that though you have come to-day against my wish, I shall do now what in any case I should have done as soon as our relation was made known. (*He takes her arm, facing WADE*). Goodbye, Father ; I'm afraid it's over between us.

WADE (*breathing hard*) : You are going ?

STEPHEN : There is no other way. Come, Pamela.

WADE : One word ! You ask no pardon ?

STEPHEN : And offer none.

[*He draws PAMELA to the door.*]

ACT TWO

Five minutes later. *Burnard's chambers in the Temple have become the office of The Coming Time. A large working table stands in the middle, and evidences of the paper are on all sides. Rona, quietly dressed, sits at the table, facing the door. There is a telephone at her elbow, and a typewriter before her. The telephone bell rings.*

Rona: *Speaking.* . . . Yes, the office of The Coming Time.
What name? . . . Mr. Vincent Edgeware? No, I'm sorry Mr. Wade is not in at present. I beg your pardon?—who am I? I'm the secretary. Yes, Miss Wade, his name. . . . I'm expecting Mr. Wade in about half an hour. . . . All right, I'll tell him you're waiting. *(She hangs up the receiver, sits a moment tapping the table impatiently, then takes off the receiver.)* I suppose, and was there four. . . . yes, please. . . . Is Mr. Vincent Wade still there? . . . Yes, Wade. . . . Secretary, Coming Time. . . . Can you bring him to the telephone for a moment? . . . Yes, I'll wait. . . . *(As she sits waiting the door bell rings; she calls out:)* Come in. *(Bill Toun enters.)* Oh, it's you, Bill.

Bill: How do you do, Rona?

Rona: Come and sit down. I'm just getting a call through to Stephen. Thank you for coming so promptly; I'll explain everything in a minute. . . . Is that you, Stephen? Rona speaking. I've just had a message from Mr. Vincent Edgeware. . . . Yes, evidently the same. . . . No, I don't know what about; I said you'd be in in half an hour—he's coming to see you. . . . Oh, yes, I shall be here. . . . Listen, Stephen! Bill has just come. . . . Well, I wrote asking him to. . . . Oh, reasons of my own. . . . But of course you'll be glad to see him. . . . Yes. . . . no, naturally. . . . All right,

GOD'S AMATEUR

then, you'll be here. Any luck, Stephen, over there? . . . Well, never mind; we shall survive it . . . Twenty minutes, then (*she hangs up the receiver*). You got my letter this morning.

BILL: And you my wire.

ROSA: It's here somewhere. Were you surprised, Bill?

BILL: I expected it, sooner or later.

ROSA: It's been longer than I intended. Six months! What changes!

BILL: And now you *have* sent for me—? (*leaning forward*).

ROSA: We'll talk about you and me afterwards—if there's anything to talk about. It's not that, Bill—it's Stephen.

BILL: Why, so I understood from what you wrote. But though I am an old friend of Stephen's, it's you I think of first.

ROSA: I know. And I've been thinking everything over. It's been good of you to leave me alone—while I worked my way out of my more savage isolation. You've heard of all this, I suppose? (*waving a hand at the room*).

BILL: Yes, I heard about it. I've even bought the paper. Miserable rag!

ROSA: Not very kind to our maiden efforts. But let that pass. Between ourselves I'm rather of your opinion; and so, I fancy, is Stephen. But he set his heart on it, and it's been a good thing for him to have something to distract his mind.

BILL: Interest in the Law quite vanished?

ROSA: It was never more than a task. And since Pamela has never failed to nag him about it—! (*she shrugs her shoulders*).

BILL: How has that marriage turned out?

ROSA: Cat and dog—as anybody could have foreseen. And the extraordinary thing is, Bill, that he loves her through thick and thin.

BILL: And it is—rather more than a bit thick?

ROSA: And a good deal worse than thin—Stephen's happiness, I mean. My God, Bill, what some of you men will put up with!

BILL: Some of us only ask for the chance.

ROSA: What would *you* do with a woman like that?

GOD'S AMATEUR

BILL : Can't say. Mine is different—I hope !

ROSA : I hope so too—not to pretend I don't know you mean me. Yet I treated you badly—so badly, I can only be surprised you've any nice feeling left for me. The trouble was, Bill, that I never loved you.

BILL : Yes—that was the trouble.

ROSA : And you were worth twenty of the man I did love—and I always knew it. Raw . . . how raw we can be ! Perhaps experience makes up for it . . . But I'm not going to talk about myself—or you, Bill, just yet. Stephen's in a bad way. There's a smash coming.

BILL : Sure of it ?

ROSA : Sure. It's all been terribly on my mind. I don't feel able to handle it alone.

BILL : Must you handle it at all ? Stephen has made his own bed ; let him lie on it. What induced you to get so mixed up with him ?

ROSA : He stood by me. I had made *my* bed—and he found me another. He played up like a brick. It was in this room : he pulled me back into the land of the living. And when I say the land of the living I mean of our sort—northerners. Stephen will come back too, I'm sure of it. What do *you* feel about London ?

BILL : Drawing all the best blood, and turning it white ?

ROSA (*nodding*) : Millions, Bill, every generation, swallowed up.

BILL : Then leave it.

ROSA : Well—we'll leave general questions like that. I've been in the throes of every kind of question since I took on this job with Stephen. I want some reality ! I've taken the boldest step I could think of.

BILL : What's that ?

ROSA : I wrote to the old man, too.

BILL : To old Wade ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

ROSA : To the Old Testament Dad ! It's been growing on me : that if Stephen is to be saved, it may be my father who at last will save him.

BILL : Whew ! Strong medicine.

ROSA : I can see it in everything Stephen does : it is nothing but reaction from his early life. I can understand it, for I have been the same. But we want something positive. We aren't here, either of us ; we're there. In London we are strangers in a strange land. I want to get Stephen away—bring about a clean cut for him !

BILL : Dangerous. Never interfere.

ROSA : Then what's love, Bill ? (*sitting back*). Didn't you interfere with me ?

BILL : Not exactly.

ROSA : Anyhow, that was the effect of your turning up. My thoughts were drawn north again. Perhaps that's one reason why I have had this feeling about Stephen.

BILL : You'd better tell me what's been happening.

ROSA (*rising and walking about the room*) : I don't think Pamela meant to marry Stephen at the beginning : he's not at all her kind of man. But when she realised he had money of his own— ! Even so, she wanted him to get on in his profession and make more, make a lot. She doesn't understand this sort of thing (*holding up some copies of the paper*). It must have been a pretty honeymoon, theirs ; when they came back there'd already been a bad split. Stephen looked like death. But he's stubborn as a mule, my dear brother—like all the rest of us ; and the upshot was that he put Pamela in the flat in Chelsea, while he spends a lot of his time here. He bought what you call this miserable rag, and dug me out for a secretary.

BILL : Anything in it, as a job ?

ROSA : Nothing at all. But it's kept us busy. A ghastly loss, of course.

BILL : So I should think.

GOD'S AMATEUR

ROSA : And so Pamela knows. And whether from native tastes, or to hurry on a crisis, she's been going it too. And now Stephen's about broke. He's got to get out of it, one way or another.

BILL : Can he sell ?

ROSA : That's one of the odd things : he can. Did you hear me telling him that a Mr. Vincent Edgeware was coming ?

BILL : Yes. Who's he ?

ROSA : Something in the City. And what's more to the point—(*stopping at BILL's side*), a friend of Pamela's.

BILL : Any particular meaning in that, Rosa ?

ROSA : Very particular. And I believe the only one who doesn't know it is Stephen.

BILL : Hell !

ROSA : Why should this Mr. Edgeware want to buy a Communist sheet ?

BILL : To queer it or smash it, perhaps ?

ROSA : When it's dying of its own weight ! No . . . I think he has begun by getting at the publishers. That's where Stephen was when I spoke to him. They've been getting restive, —don't like the paper, threatened to stop printing. The fact is, Bill, *The Coming Time* is not worth buying. There's something behind.

BILL : Certainly looks like it.

ROSA : Now another thing—or the same from another angle. Do you remember, when you came here that afternoon, passing a girl on the stairs ?

BILL : Yes. She looked warm stuff.

ROSA : Poppy Miles. Whatever she looked, she's kept her virtue through everything, and that's saying a lot. When Stephen married she was on the rocks. I worked it for her to go to them as housemaid. I wanted somebody to keep an eye on Stephen's home life—a spy on Pamela, if you like.

BILL : Dirty.

GOD'S AMATEUR

ROSA : Means to ends. She has been a comfort to Stephen—looked after him a bit : there's not much home life there ! Often and often, she's told me—but we needn't go into that. I see her usually once a week, on her day out ; for I needn't tell you that I am not popular in Chelsea. I'm meeting her this afternoon, and shall hear the latest.

BILL : And what do you want me to do, Rosa ?

ROSA : I've no plans. I'm only sure there is trouble right on us. I thought you might consent to be on the spot—a reliable friend to Stephen. Can you spare the time ?

BILL : It's inconvenient, but I'll manage it.

ROSA : Good. I feel easier.

BILL : Now, enough for the present of Stephen's business. Think a little of your own—that is to say, mine.

ROSA : I will, Bill (*sitting beside him*). I've not been neglecting it. You know the best way to think things out is not to think at all ; work as hard as you can at something else, and a day will come when you know what you want to do.

BILL : Has it come ?

ROSA : You are quite sure you know your own mind ?

BILL : Quite.

ROSA : Well then, Bill, we begin again—don't we ?

BILL : From this moment.

ROSA : Only let me stay with Stephen as long as he needs me . . . I'll tell you everything about myself—

BILL : I'm satisfied. Everything you've done is part of what you are. If I accept that—

ROSA : But I shall have to tell you. I think I shall be able to love a little . . .

BILL : That's my racket, anyway.

ROSA : And I shall play the game this time. All the better for what went before—if you can believe it.

BILL : I believe it—though I don't say it's any more my view of things than it ever was. But this will do.

GOD'S AMATEUR

ROSA : Ardent lover ; poetic chap, aren't you, Bill !

BILL : Not much in that line, perhaps. I want you up north. When you're ready, say the word.

ROSA : And then you'll get busy. Still—what about a kiss, Bill ? I'm rather starved.

BILL (*pulled up*) : That's done it.

ROSA : You couldn't now to save your life ! Tha's a stiff lad, Todd (*in northern speech*). We are being silly as they make 'em. There ! (*kissing him*).

BILL : God, Rosa (*as she slips away*).

ROSA (*laughing*) : What a prospect ! Can I face it ?

BILL : We'll see (*catching her in his arms*).

[*The door opens and STEPHEN enters.*

STEPHEN : The deuce ! My dear Bill !

BILL : Caught in the act.

STEPHEN : I'm sorry—such a moment. But I'm delighted, Bill. I'm so glad, Rosa. I hadn't an idea—

BILL : Too full of your own affairs.

STEPHEN : Yes (*throwing his hat aside*). I've been pretty deeply in. Has Rosa told you anything ? This Edgeware man has not been yet, Rosa ?

ROSA : No, but he's due. What kept you ?

STEPHEN : I turned into the Temple church, to think a little. Pity we can't cut a way out of our difficulties with sword and lance. Have you studied the faces of the Crusaders in there ? (*to BILL*).

BILL : Can't say I have.

STEPHEN : Go and look at them—and take Rosa with you. She must be sick of this office, as I am. But this is fine news, Rosa, your making it up with Bill. My most loving congratulations, dear girl (*taking her hands*).

ROSA : Bill wants to have a talk with you. And keep him here when Mr. Edgeware comes. Two heads are better than one.

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : When one of them is mine ! I think it's a business deal, Bill. But you, Rosa—

ROSA : I'll go and have a cup of tea. You won't want me. I shall come back later, of course : only going as far as Lyons' in the Strand (*looking at BILL as she puts her hat on*). I can be fetched. Don't let Stephen do anything hasty.

STEPHEN : What do you say, Bill, to meeting a type ?

BILL : I'll stay, if I shan't be in the way.

STEPHEN : Not in mine.

ROSA : Get to the bottom of things, Stephen. Look after him, Bill (*she goes out*).

STEPHEN : My guide, philosopher and friend (*as the door closes*). You're making no mistake, Bill ; she's genuine, right through.

BILL : Are you ?

STEPHEN : Why, yes, I think so. My opinions seem rather changeable, but there's a conviction under all that.

BILL : I'm not talking of your opinions. I think them crazy, mostly. Anyhow, I don't argue. I meant in character.

STEPHEN (*smiling*) : All character is stupidity.

BILL : Epigram. What's the conviction ?

STEPHEN : That there's something real to get down to, something true, always just round the corner. My life is a search.

BILL : What have you turned up, so far ? (*they sit on opposite sides of the table*).

STEPHEN : One or two things—which you might not value. The curious thing about life, Bill, is that so much is true, as far as it goes. All we want to find is the unifying principle, or the common will, and all things will become clear.

BILL : You haven't found the will.

STEPHEN : Yet it must be there. Life goes on, fulfilling itself—in some way we cannot grasp. We want the clue. Without that, everything is provisional.

GOD'S AMATEUR

BILL : And you try one thing after another. Nothing that sticks.

STEPHEN : Yes, one thing. Love. Or call it sex. . . . Universal, Bill, insistent, not to be shaken off !

BILL : Wanted to shake it off ?

STEPHEN : In weak moments. One gets tired, discouraged . . . (*resting his face in his hands*).

BILL : The wrong woman, Steve ?

STEPHEN : Is there such a creature ? Whoever it is—if you love—she is the right one. The only possible one. Self-evident, isn't it ? You may complain of your nose, but there it is. Not that I complain of Pamela . . . we are both thinking about her, so why disguise it ?

BILL : Faithful ?—you, I mean.

STEPHEN : You don't mean me. But I'll answer your question. In one sense I am not.

BILL : What sense ?

STEPHEN : Finding a certain homely refuge in a servant girl. I've wept on her breast. That's the extent of it.

BILL : Oh yes—this Poppy Miles. Rosa told me. Very rash.

STEPHEN : Do I care ? Poppy, well-named—the anodyne !

BILL : You don't want me to call you a fool ?

STEPHEN : No, I don't ; but you may, if you like.

BILL : You said I didn't mean you : faithful.

STEPHEN : You know you didn't.

BILL : It's not what a man asks—of his friend.

STEPHEN : It's what I'd answer—to a friend.

BILL : Here I am.

STEPHEN : Where there is no knowledge, and none sought—

BILL : In other words, you dam' well suspect.

STEPHEN : No, for there is no suspicion. Suspicion implies condemnation. What is, is : and I do not judge.

BILL : Chuck it, Steve. You'll not make a fool of me.

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : God made the fools, with the wise. Let them grow together—

BILL (*rising*) : I'm getting out of this. No—I promised Rosa I'd look after you (*sitting down again*). You need it. Why, in God's name, did you take on this paper ?

STEPHEN : What it advocates it the most alive, the most courageous, and if not the most hopeful movement of our time, one that is certainly going to leave the deepest mark on the near centuries.

BILL : Leading article. I've read some of them.

STEPHEN : One reader at least ! The fowls came and ate . . .

BILL : Look here, Stephen ; all this Christ-stuff is new. You used to be an atheist.

STEPHEN : Starting from the deeps, Bill.

BILL : Well, cut it out, with me. About the paper. You're going to sell, aren't you ?

STEPHEN (*rousing himself*) : It's simply that I've not made a success of it. I gave one little push to the wheel—it made me feel good for a time—but I am plainly not the man. There are others, and I can find work elsewhere. It's the usual story with these small weekly papers : you buy, you hold on as long as you can, and you sell.

BILL : If you're lucky.

STEPHEN : If you're lucky. Well, the world doesn't end here ; the world I'm looking for doesn't even begin—not with a thousand such sheets, or perhaps in a thousand years, for that matter. Though I'm a believer in the catastrophic rather than in orderly revolution—

BILL : And you're rambling on in this way with catastrophe at your feet ? What are you made of, man ! Pull yourself up, and take hold.

STEPHEN : To do—what ?

BILL : To take order in your home life, and get to work on your profession.

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : Mr. Worldly-wiseman !

BILL : And a very good thing too, since we live in the world. Why, damn it, Steve—(*the door bell rings*).

STEPHEN (*rising*) : This will be Mr. Edgeware. I didn't tell you : he's dined with us once or twice—but no friend of mine (*as he goes to the door BILL rises and steps aside*). Come in, Mr. Edgeware.

[VINCENT EDGEWARE *walks in with his hat on : a stoutish, middle-aged man of business : kind and friendly and accommodating according to his lights ; at once sharp and naïve, and wholly unaware that he is anything but the best of fellows.*

EDGEWARE : Good afternoon (*pausing, on seeing BILL*).

STEPHEN : My friend Mr. Todd.

EDGEWARE : How do you do (*BILL nods*). Part of the show, Wade ?

STEPHEN : Oh, no.

EDGEWARE : Sorry I've interrupted you. I told your secretary—private business.

BILL : Shall I go, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Please stay. You can speak quite freely before Mr. Todd (*to EDGEWARE*).

EDGEWARE : Just as you like (*laying his hat on the table*). At least, for the first part of it. Mr. Todd knows the desirability of silence outside, till a deal is put through ?

STEPHEN : Certainly. Sit down, Mr. Edgeware.

EDGEWARE : Oh, come, there's no call for misters (*taking BILL's late chair, while BILL takes another towards the back, and STEPHEN goes round to his own*). You know what I've come for ?

STEPHEN : The paper.

EDGEWARE : *The Coming Time* (*winking at BILL*). How has it been going lately ?

STEPHEN : Badly—as to sales.

GOD'S AMATEUR

EDGEWARE : I meant sales. What I like about you, Wade, is that you own up at once. I say nothing about the policy of the paper—except that if I buy it, it will be changed.

STEPHEN : So I imagined. What I don't understand is why you think of buying it at all.

EDGEWARE : Well, I may have some little stunt of my own. It amuses a man—and I can afford it. First—I've had nothing definite on this, you know—are you willing to sell ?

STEPHEN : Say I am not.

EDGEWARE : You know your own business best. You've one difficulty, though, in carrying on. True, you might publish with another house. I looked in at your present people's on the way here. You'd recently gone.

STEPHEN : Had you previously had anything to do with my reception, Mr. Edgeware ?

EDGEWARE : Oh, no—except that the old man and I are associated in another concern. As publisher, he's liable to the police if you go too far. I'm not putting on any screw. We are friends, I hope, Wade ?

STEPHEN (*drily*) : I hope so.

EDGEWARE : And therefore I want to act *as* a friend. Come, tell me the truth. You wouldn't be sorry to part with the paper. You're a young man; and if I may say so, your back isn't quite broad enough to carry this sort of thing. We've all tried it on in our time, one way or another. Well, I'll get you out of it.

STEPHEN : Very kind of you, Mr. Edgeware.

EDGEWARE : I don't say that. I have my own motives, and you needn't feel under any obligation. Still, the price ! I could drive a hard bargain ; no use mincing matters there. As to the finances of the paper, you are in it up to the neck ; and if I'm not to see in Mr. Todd a rival saviour, you'll be glad of a friend in me. (*He cocks his eye at BILL, with as much effect as if he'd done so at a piece of furniture*).

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : This is the third time you have used the word friend. Isn't it a matter of business ?

EDGEWARE : Well, what do you think, Mr. Todd ? There's a good deal under that face of yours, if I'm not mistaken. Does it look altogether like business ?

BILL : I'm waiting to see.

EDGEWARE : If it was, it mightn't be a bad thing for him to have you to watch his interest, for our friend here is a bit—eh ? (*trying jocosity, with equal unsucccess*). I'm going to show you that you may be easy. Now, Wade, I want one figure from you, and one only. What did you pay for *The Coming Time* ?

STEPHEN : Am I to answer that, Bill ?

BILL : Best lay your cards on the table.

EDGEWARE : Especially as I may know already ! I only spoke about a figure for this reason ; that I'll pay you what you gave !

STEPHEN : Really, Mr. Edgeware— !

EDGEWARE : Oh, I know all about depreciation : fifty per cent. would be a cautious estimate. But I stand to what I've said. I take it it's a deal.

STEPHEN : Certainly it's a remarkable offer.

EDGEWARE : And I'll do more for you ! You are weighted down with a certain amount of debt. That's not a matter I want to go into before a third party, but to show you what sort of man I am, I'll see what can be done—

STEPHEN (*stiffly*) : Do you think I could possibly accept this ?

EDGEWARE : Why not ? When a man likes you, and wants to give you a lift—

STEPHEN : May I speak with my friend a moment ?

EDGEWARE : Sure (*rising*). I'll take a look out of the window (*he walks to the back, and lights a cigar*).

STEPHEN (*as BILL moves to his side*) : What does this mean, Bill ?

BILL : It's a bribe.

STEPHEN : For what conceivable purpose ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

BILL : You'll have to find out. Reject the offer, and see.

STEPHEN : I will . . . Mr. Edgeware (*EDGEWARE returns*). Your offer is generous. Too generous. I must decline it.

EDGEWARE : Think twice, Wade.

STEPHEN : What I've said is final.

EDGEWARE : So ? (*looking from one to the other*). Then can we now do without Mr. Todd ?

STEPHEN : Don't move, Bill. I cannot imagine anything, Mr. Edgeware, that you mayn't say in my friend's presence.

EDGEWARE : Perhaps I can (*blowing smoke into the air*). But if my delicacy is out of place—

STEPHEN : What do you mean ?

EDGEWARE : I've been a guest at your table. You may say it's not my business, but I don't like the way you treat your wife.

BILL : Either I must go, Stephen, or kick Mr. Edgeware down the stairs.

STEPHEN : Wait—and no violence, please. Now, Mr. Edgeware : please go on.

EDGEWARE : There is a girl in your flat named Poppy Miles.

STEPHEN : There is. What has that to do with your visit ?

EDGEWARE : Will you now oblige me, Mr. Todd ? I've said what I have, only to induce you to leave me with your friend. It's a private matter, you see.

BILL : Blackmail ?

EDGEWARE : Now, is that likely ? I could buy Mr. Wade up with two fingers of my left hand. I'm only setting about doing a friendly thing—to get Mr. Wade out of a mess. I've tried one thing, and it doesn't seem to be appreciated. The offer still holds good—you are a witness—and I'm trying now to show reason why it should be accepted. Sit down, if you've got to be one of us, and let us talk like men of the world.

BILL : Goodbye, Stephen, I can't stand any more of this.

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : All right, Bill (*going with him to the door*). Fetch Rosa. I'll hear what he has to say, and we can talk it over afterwards. You remember where Rosa said she was going ?

BILL : I'll find it. Let the swine finish, since he's begun.

STEPHEN : I mean to. (BILL *goes*). Now, Mr. Edgeware (*returning*). Won't you take your former chair ?

EDGEWARE : That's being sensible. No offence, you understand, Wade ?

STEPHEN : I understand you can scarcely help it. Straight out, please. What have you come for ?

EDGEWARE : Have a cigar ?

STEPHEN : No, thank you.

EDGEWARE : Then I'll put away my own (*he jabs it out*). I came for what I told you—to lose money in relieving you of your paper.

STEPHEN : Why ?

EDGEWARE : Well, I may make a profit on it yet ; I've got a live man who'll work it up for re-sale. I think of turning it into a society-theatrical paper : spicy, you know—what the public wants. The Coming Time !—when all the old sentimental nonsense will be cleared out of the way. And High Brow, too, mind you : you were right there. But it's all a question of how you present it. You must apply the flattering touch : Tom, Dick and Harry like to be told they're brainy. And that's where you went wrong, my boy. You expected them to *be* brainy, and it's depressing.

STEPHEN : I've already refused your offer.

EDGEWARE : Oh no, you haven't ; it stands to reason. But you knew there was something else, and you wanted to make a market. It was well enough done, but I'm too old a bird for that. Now listen here, Wade : what you're after is a clean sweep, in this office and at home.

STEPHEN : Indeed ? I should have said you were incredible—

GOD'S AMATEUR

EDGEWARE: Don't get off the point. If ever there was an unhappy man, it's you. Married to a wife you don't understand—and can't afford. Now I'm a widower. I've been through the mill, and know what's what. I understand women, and women understand me. If it weren't a vulgar thing to slap your pocket, I'd do it—to show where the secret lies.

STEPHEN: I'm glad you refrain from the more obvious signs.

EDGEWARE: Be as sarcastic as you like; I know how to make allowances. Now in plain words, Wade, what about a divorce?

STEPHEN: Good God—! (*pushing his chair back*).

EDGEWARE: Don't get excited. I'm sweet on Pamela: never been more so with any woman, or half as much.

STEPHEN: Be careful.

EDGEWARE: That's what *you'd* better be, or some of us might remind you of this Poppy Miles. Nice girl, too—I don't blame you. What we all want is an everyday arrangement. You are sorry you married Pamela, she's sorry she married you. You don't quite come up to expectation, if I may say so. No fault of yours, I daresay; it was just a mistake on both sides. That's why I've said you want a clean sweep.

STEPHEN (*thickly*): Has Pamela sent you?

EDGEWARE: Give a man credit for a little decency, Mr. Wade!—of course she hasn't. This is just man to man.

STEPHEN: Thank God for that. . . .

EDGEWARE (*full of sympathy*): You're all cut up. It's natural. So have I been in my time. But it's better to face it and get it over—isn't it? Now you consent to let Pamela divorce you. You can set up comfortably with your fancy: *lar vee oh garson*, as the Frogs say. I'll make everything as easy as pie for you. There's nothing I wouldn't do for Pamela. Why, I'll take on all her debts—you don't know half of 'em! And instead of three people being miserable—for I'm one of them as things are—

STEPHEN (*starting up*): Get out!

GOD'S AMATEUR

EDGEWARE : Eh, what ? Just when we're beginning to see eye to eye—

STEPHEN : Get out !

EDGEWARE : Damned if I will ! (*standing*). Who are you to take this tone ?—a bankrupt, weak-kneed, Communist, free-thinking hypocrite—

STEPHEN : If I had a weapon—! But though my hands will never be clean again—(*going round the table*).

EDGEWARE : Keep off (*backing on the door*). If you won't listen to a friendly proposal—(*the bell rings*). Good thing for you. Here's Mr. Todd back, to prevent you making a fool of yourself. (*He opens the door, admitting old MR. WADE, with PAMELA following. The door is pushed to, but not quite closed*). What the dickens ! (*falling back*).

WADE (*going straight to STEPHEN*) : You must excuse me, Stephen. Is this some business interview ? (*looking at EDGEWARE*).

STEPHEN : Yes.

WADE : May we take precedence ? If I had known—I should not have come in.

STEPHEN : The gentleman is just going (*drily*).

WADE : I beg your pardon, sir (*waiting for him to go*).

PAMELA : But Mr. Edgeware is a friend of ours. I didn't know he would be here, Mr. Wade ; but as we have found him with Stephen, I should be obliged if you would allow him to stay.

WADE : That is for my son, madam (*looking at STEPHEN*).

STEPHEN : We are waiting for you, Mr. Edgeware.

EDGEWARE : So you are Wade's father, sir ? (*to WADE*).

WADE : I am.

EDGEWARE : Pleased to meet you. I've been trying to do your son a good turn.

WADE : Well ?

EDGEWARE : He's been getting rather into it with both feet lately, if he'll allow me to say so. Perhaps that's why you're here.

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Mrs. Wade has said she'll be obliged if I may stay. I'm wanting to be of use. Not my way to butt in, but I know all about it, and there's no time like the present.

PAMELA : None (*looking steadily at STEPHEN*).

WADE : It's for you to say, Stephen.

STEPHEN : Very well. Will you all sit down ?

[PAMELA and EDGEWARE sit ; WADE and STEPHEN remain on their feet, facing each other.]

WADE (*to STEPHEN*) : One of the things you appear to have forfeited is the right to privacy.

STEPHEN : And to justice, sir ?

WADE : I will try to be just. I do not know in what capacity this—this gentleman—may be of use, nor to whom—

PAMELA : To me. As a witness. (*STEPHEN glances at her, returns to observation of his father*).

WADE : Your sister has written to me. She gave no explanation, but begged me to see you ; she asked me not to go to your home, but to come here. I started at once, but as I do not take instructions from Rosa, I went to your flat. I found your wife in, and asked her what was the matter. After her first surprise, and breaking down, she told me . . . I did not approve of your marriage, but marriage once entered into is sacred ; and my son's wife is entitled to all the honour—

STEPHEN : Is this honourable ? Do you accuse me, do you condemn me, unheard—

WADE : I have come straight to hear you, bringing your accuser. I have been told that, that a son of mine . . . (*he pauses*). You may no longer consider yourself my son. And ask what right I, a stranger, have to seek you. This lady, nevertheless, is by your own act my daughter ; and appealed to by *her* for justice—

STEPHEN : What justice, Pamela ?

PAMELA : Will you continue to speak for me, Mr. Wade ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

WADE : I am told, Stephen, that you harbour in your home a young woman—a young woman placed there by your unhappy sister—with what connivance in wrong-doing I can only surmise—

STEPHEN : Stop. Please keep Rosa's name out of it. Are you so blinded by your moral indignation as to have lost, at the very least, your pride ?

WADE : I apologise—to my son—who has dragged that pride in the dust . . . The charge is made against you of familiarity with your wife's servant. This charge is true or false.

STEPHEN : It is false.

WADE (*bowing*) : If I accept your word, am I justified in your eyes ? I have brought a foul slander into the light of day, and its perpetrators are before you.

STEPHEN (*with intense irony*) : I thank you.

PAMELA : May I now be heard ?

STEPHEN : Will you first send Mr. Edgeware away ?

PAMELA : Scarcely, at this juncture ! You have been an unwilling witness, Mr. Edgeware. Will you say what you have witnessed ?

EDGEWARE : Well, nobody likes to make trouble in families, you know. And Mr. Wade wants to be rid of me. We all know about that, Wade ! But there's two to all this, and something's been said about slander and perpetrators. Seems to me I leave a certain slander on myself behind me, if I don't speak up. I put it to you, Wade !

STEPHEN : You may please yourself, Mr. Edgeware. I was not thinking of you (*with another look at PAMELA*).

EDGEWARE : It was when I last dined with you and Mrs. Wade. I've met her since, you'll observe. It was not a cheerful evening—and it was painful to an onlooker. You took yourself off, you may remember, into another room. I didn't like that ; and on a pretext I came to look for you. The door was a crack open, and I looked in. You were sitting at the table, and this young woman

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was leaning over you. You had one of her hands in yours, and—well, what would *you* think !

STEPHEN : Is that all ?

EDGEWARE : Enough too. If it had been me, that would have been conclusive.

STEPHEN : And you, Pamela ?

PAMELA : I have seen much more. I don't choose to enter into details.

WADE : Well, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : So far as Mr. Edgeware's statement goes, it is quite true. I was weeping, and there was one who tried to strengthen me . . .

WADE : Do you admit, then—

STEPHEN : I admit nothing. I have said—what I have said.

[EDGEWARE *shrugs his shoulders, and rises, going for his hat. He waits near the door. PAMELA rises too, waiting on WADE.*

WADE and STEPHEN exchange a last duel of eyes.

WADE : I am left in doubt . . .

STEPHEN : I cannot help you.

WADE : Do you take my son's word, madam ? (*turning to PAMELA*).

PAMELA : It is immaterial. Stephen has not been what I hoped. He has neglected me, and wasted his means and his reputation—you know how. I had thought by marrying him to reclaim him. It was a mistake. Now, for the happiness of all, will it not be best to end it ?

WADE : A separation ?

PAMELA : Well, not exactly that. My position in that case—

WADE : What is it you want ?

PAMELA : Isn't it obvious ? If I can do nothing but make Stephen wretched, and he, me— ?

WADE : What then ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : I was looking for your influence, Mr. Wade. You were very opposed to our marrying. Support me in trying to set Stephen free.

WADE : How ?

PAMELA : By divorcing him. The means are not far to seek : cruelty, a proved infidelity.

WADE : No !

STEPHEN : Pamela (*going to her*).

PAMELA (*beginning to lose her temper*) : You expect me to sit down, under the insult of this girl, and with ruin coming every day nearer through your absurd, or even criminal life here—

STEPHEN : Have I ceased to love you ?

PAMELA : But love, love—when it only means this ! Yes, you love me in a way ; you are infatuated. If we were boy and girl it might be charming. But as things are, it is—well, a little tedious. You must be sensible. I've only pressed the matter of Poppy to make you realise the opportunity : though I have no doubts at all it has gone further than you say. I shall take steps to get an admission from the girl herself, if you force me to it.

EDGEWARE : There are some people coming into the hall.

PAMELA : Shut the door and turn the key. I'm not going out of this room until—

STEPHEN : Excuse me, Mr. Edgeware (*ousting EDGEWARE from the door*). I must see who they are (*looking out into the vestibule*). Wait one moment (*looking back, and then drawing the door to after him*).

EDGEWARE : There's three of them, Pamela.

[WADE gives him a sharp look on hearing the name thus familiarly used. PAMELA tosses her head and sits down. There is a moment's pause ; then STEPHEN ushers in POPPY MILES. BILL and ROSA follow, remaining by the door.]

STEPHEN : I seem to be the centre of a double conspiracy, Pamela : for me and against. I don't like this, but it appears

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that Poppy has something to say. You have accused me of misconduct with her, and have spoken of taking steps to get an admission from the girl herself. Here she is.

POPPY : It isn't true, Mrs. Wade.

PAMELA : Your word, of course, would be final ! Is it your sister, Stephen, that has brought my servant here ? (*rising*).

ROSA : Yes, it was me.

PAMELA : And the stranger beside her—who is he ?

STEPHEN : My friend William Todd.

PAMELA : I throw myself on your protection, Mr. Wade (*going to WADE*). Of your daughter's reputation you are the best judge. Of her companion's I have no knowledge.

EDGEWARE : Steady on ; Mr. Todd's all right.

PAMELA : Right or wrong, I protest against outsiders being brought into our private affairs. Will you take my part, Mr. Wade ?

WADE : I'm surprised to find you here, Bill—and in company with Rosa.

BILL : I have good ground, Mr. Wade (*drawing Rosa's arm through his*).

WADE : At any other time that sight might bring me comfort. But I cannot now . . . Is your presence necessary, Bill ?

BILL : I believe it may be, sir, for Stephen's sake. I was present when Mr. Edgeware committed himself to certain proposals.

EDGEWARE : Here, what's this ? Committed ?

BILL : I used the word Blackmail, Mr. Edgeware. I repeat it.

EDGEWARE : You may repeat it in a Court of Law, Mr. Todd, if you're not careful. Are these the thanks I get for a friendly offer ? Stand away from the door, please.

BILL : I think not.

EDGEWARE : Well, upon my soul ? (*looking in doubt at PAMELA*).

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : I have appealed to you, Mr. Wade. It is solely by your will that I am here at all. Does all this look well to you ?

WADE : It looks very ill . . . Have I your permission, Stephen, to behave as if this were my own house ?

STEPHEN : Full permission, sir.

WADE : My son has spoken of a double conspiracy. I wish to find out what this means. May we first send this young woman away ? (*looking at POPPY*). She has denied the charge against her.

PAMELA (*with curling lip*) : She has denied !

POPPY : I am a virtuous girl, sir (*to WADE*) ; and if a doctor's certificate is wanted to prove it, it's easy to get one. Will that do, Mr. Wade ? (*to STEPHEN*).

STEPHEN : Are you answered, Pamela ?

PAMELA : Legally, perhaps. You should know. Now before I say anything more, please turn this guttersnipe out.

STEPHEN : Please, Poppy. Thank you.

ROSA : Go on, Poppy.

POPPY : I will. I'm going to speak up. And I'll ask Mrs. Wade to look at me. *And Mr. Edgeware.*

EDGEWARE : Eh, what ? Me ?

PAMELA : This is abominable. Mr. Wade—

STEPHEN : Rosa ! Take Poppy away.

ROSA : No, Stephen. You can throw me off afterwards, but we are going through with it now.

STEPHEN : I forbid you to say anything, Poppy. Come with me (*taking her peremptorily by the arm*).

WADE : Stephen ?

STEPHEN : This can't go on, sir. You see me, Pamela ? I am putting Poppy out.

POPPY : Well she knows why !

[ROSA and BILL stand aside as STEPHEN conveys POPPY to the door and dismisses her. He returns tense and slightly trembling. PAMELA has resumed her seat.]

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : I am cleared, I believe, of what concerned me personally. I have refused your offer for the paper, Mr. Edgeware, and we have no further occasion to meet. I have shown you which way the door lies.

EDGEWARE : Oh, very well (*moving a step, glancing again at PAMELA*).

STEPHEN : I need not say, Pamela, that you will see no more of this man.

PAMELA : You need not say it, or anything else. I shall do as I please. Wait a minute, Vincent.

EDGEWARE : How's that, Wade ? (*pausing before STEPHEN*).

[*It looks for a moment as though STEPHEN will strike him. BILL takes a step forward. STEPHEN however looks through and beside EDGEWARE, turning his tortured eyes upon PAMELA.*]

PAMELA : I came here with one plain intention—to bring about our divorce. I wanted to respect your honour if I could. (*STEPHEN seems about to speak, but closes his mouth*). It appears you won't let me divorce you. You have grounds for divorcing me. I would not have said so publicly, if you had been reasonable.

EDGEWARE : There you are, you see, Wade ! This is what might have been settled quite quietly between ourselves ! Of course, the more gentlemanly thing would have been for you to have allowed yourself to be divorced by Pamela—

STEPHEN (*sharply*) : Mrs. Wade !

EDGEWARE : Mrs. Wade : I am corrected. I suppose you weren't quite the man to have been really guilty in this Poppy affair, but it would have shown good feeling on your part to fall in—the young woman could have been squared. Well, then, how do we stand now ? I might be excused about the paper, after your twice showing me the door, but I'm a man of my word—the offer still holds good.

STEPHEN (*to WADE*) : What do you think I ought to do ?

WADE : Divorce.

STEPHEN : And you, Rosa ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

ROSA : Divorce.

STEPHEN : And Bill too, I expect ?

EDGEWARE : Everybody, Wade. From the point of view of society, religion and common sense—

STEPHEN : What would you do afterwards, Pamela ?

PAMELA : I should marry Mr. Edgeware. I'm sorry, for all our sakes, that I didn't know him before I met you.

STEPHEN (*struggling to speak*) : You're all against me . . . Society—religion—and common sense ! . . . My father would say morality—a fixed code, and punishment of the offender.

WADE : I do so, Stephen.

STEPHEN : It goes into no fine points—where the punishment may fall . . . My sister, I believe, wants only to save me from a life of unhappiness—as if there was any happiness in the remedy ! We'll leave common sense out—I'm not sure I know what it is.

EDGEWARE : We shall all be with you there. But you may take it from me—

STEPHEN : I take nothing from you. About society and religion I feel more able to speak. I'm one with my father in this—that I think marriage sacred. It's the last real bond holding society together ; when it goes, everything will go with it.

PAMELA : Need you prose, Stephen ?

EDGEWARE : And who's talking about marriage going ? Why, it's what I'm asking for.

STEPHEN : Appealing to society and religion !

EDGEWARE : And common sense—don't forget that. Much good the others are without it !

STEPHEN : You are a living example of what they become with it, Mr. Edgeware. If society is all—and such society !—let it go. Do what you like, Pamela ; and to the devil with every one of us.

PAMELA : For me to do what I like—

STEPHEN : Yes—I must do what I don't like. And I shall not.

[*There is a moment of silence.*]

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA (*breaking out*): Do you think I shall sit down—! But don't you see—(*she chokes with rage*).

EDGEWARE: Well, well! This is a high-toned sort of thing (*looking round*); with your wife's lover actually before you, and all the world looking on? It beats me!

PAMELA: Do you imagine I shall accept—!

STEPHEN: You must accept. And now, send Mr. Edgeware away.

PAMELA: Nothing of the kind! Mr. Wade! Do you support Stephen in this outrageous, this preposterous—(*she stops again, speechless*).

WADE: He is his own master. I should say the outrage is unpardonable and you have committed it; and if my son designs to punish you by the only means in his power, he will have gone far towards recovering my respect. This is my last word to you. And I decline (*looking at EDGEWARE*) to remain longer in the same room with an avowed adulterer. (*He walks to the door*).

ROSA: Stay a minute, Father (*holding the door*). Stephen! Isn't there another to go first? (*pointing to EDGEWARE*).

STEPHEN: Once more, Pamela: do you intend to send Mr. Edgeware away?

PAMELA: I do not. I shall bring you to your senses. I shall live with Vincent openly, and advertise it till shame forces you—

EDGEWARE: Hey, hold on a bit, Pamela.

PAMELA (*continuing, to STEPHEN*): And I shall hold you to me, as I know I can, by this love you talk about. Do you think I don't know how to do it?—to torture you day and night? Ah, you'll see—yes, you'll see!

EDGEWARE: Nix on the ginger! Damn it, listen to me: you're forgetting yourself. (*PAMELA and the rest look at him*). There's been a hard word used. If old Mr. Wade doesn't see a distinction between doing the right thing and what he's called it, I do. If young Mr. Wade thinks I'm going to lend myself to any manager trar* business, he's mistaken. Let everything be

* *Mr. Edgeware's rendering of ménage-à-trois.*

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done regularly and properly, and I marry Pamela. If not, it's off !
Now I'm going of my own accord.

PAMELA : Vincent !

EDGEWARE : No, I'll see you later, Pamela. I'm hurt. Fellows in the City understand a co-respondent when it's a good-looking woman and everything's cleaned up afterwards. But I'm a moral man, and I don't shuffle over anybody's doorstep. And that's that. Be so good as to open the door for me, young lady (*Rosa steps aside and he walks out*).

PAMELA (*with half a shriek*) : Do you see what you've done, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : I think I do. And you have helped me.

PAMELA : You've ruined my life—you and Rosa between you. Very well then ! Come home ! I've been easy with you. You didn't know the first beginnings of what a woman wants. I'll teach you ! And to begin with, you'll shut up this place at once ! Rosa can go and earn her living—as she knows how. You'll realise your capital and pay your debts. And then you'll work : not at all the detestable nonsense of this room, but at your profession. Give me your arm : we'll begin a new life from this moment.

STEPHEN : We will, Pamela (*stepping back*). But before mine will be again with you,—things must work round . . . I shall go away ; I don't know where, or for how long. I shall pay everything ; I shall provide for Rosa as long as she needs it. You shall have the use of what's left, over and above the little it will cost me—on foot—

WADE (*advancing*) : What is this, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : It's my one hope, sir. I must find the clue, or die . . . If this—all you have seen—is one man's experience of the world about us—

WADE : The world to every man is what he makes it.

STEPHEN : Is there no God ? Must it rest with such as me, and Pamela and Edgeware—and this (*flinging down a pile of papers*)—and these (*tearing a row of books from a shelf*)—and politics, and

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wars, and economics, and the City ? Is love a bestiality and a torment, and beauty a lure of the devil ; is history a despair, and religion a lie ?

ROSA (*at his side*) : Stephen ! Come away.

STEPHEN : Goodbye, Pamela (*controlling himself*). I shan't go till everything is put in order. I shall find a friend to help me here, and stay with me. Can I count on you, Bill ?

BILL : Yes.

STEPHEN : He will act as go-between—in all matters of business. Please now go home.

PAMELA : And I—I'm to be good and have no say ?

STEPHEN : It is all said.

PAMELA : We shall see.

ACT THREE

SCENE I. *Three months later. A silhouette of dark pines against the afterglow of sunset ; near the summit of a hill in the Black Forest, Germany. STEPHEN sits motionless on a felled tree, in rough walking costume. Nailed to one of the trees, under a little penthouse, is a rude wooden Christ. Stephen looks older, and his face is deeply tanned. Presently comes a whistle from below, which STEPHEN, rousing himself, replies to ; and BILL TODD, breathing as from a climb, enters.*

BILL : You've been sitting there for half an hour, Stephen.

STEPHEN : Have I ? I should have said five minutes. Sorry.

BILL : I've been poking about in the wood. Time we were getting back for dinner. Strange how it's all cultivated here ; great forests like these, but not wild as they would be in England. Why, every tree is marked ; and though you don't often see men at work, the signs of them are everywhere.

STEPHEN : Yes. This whole vast country is a green workshop.

BILL : And these large peasants' houses ! I should have expected hovels. The people here can't be rich, but they are certainly not poor.

STEPHEN : One explanation has not occurred to you ?

BILL : I can't say it has. What explanation ?

STEPHEN : That (*pointing to the Christ*).

BILL : Another of them ? (*looking up*). They're all over the place. No, I should call those the sign of a backward population. That's the funny thing about it.

STEPHEN : It is a sign of backwardness.

BILL : Yes, there may be more poverty than meets the eye. But for a country district, miles from the railway, this is about the

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most advanced thing I have seen—if fine clean houses, good clothes, and healthy faces go for anything. Long hours, though, and a lot of exposure : those little girls who watch the cattle !

STEPHEN : Bare-footed, mostly. Poor little things, eh ?

BILL : Well, they don't look unhappy. I must say that.

STEPHEN : Sunk in ignorance ; as they would be, in a backward country.

BILL : That's another queer thing : why, they are often reading. And one little mite down there was reciting something from a book. Sounded like poetry.

STEPHEN : Schiller, perhaps, or Goethe—or maybe *unser* Shakespeare. Not like our enlightened farm labourers, Bill !

BILL : Then what do you mean by backwardness ?

STEPHEN : You used the word ; I repeated it. I was thinking something like this : Suppose there was a time when in things that matter men really were advanced—advanced as far as men can go. Suppose they had since fallen away. Then to be backward might be . . . like a man returning to firm ground who has been stepping into a swamp. The whole question in advancing is where you want to go.

BILL : Ump. You might have asked yourself that question any time these past ten years.

STEPHEN : Did I do anything *but* ask it ?

BILL : Most men when they ask themselves a question find the answer—and there's an end of it.

STEPHEN : Because the answer is there first. They ask a question to find the excuse—for doing what they know they ought not.

BILL : Does that mean that all you did was what you ought ? You won't excuse making a mess of things by being self-righteous about it.

STEPHEN (*sighing*) : To be right—and not self-righteous . . . there is a way (*standing*). I've seen it here.

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BILL : The simple life, next ?—a cabbage patch, a pig or two ? I give you a year. And then the same old story.

STEPHEN : Yes—if it depended on cabbages and pigs, or cabbages and kings. Seek ye first—

BILL : Oh, chuck it, Steve. I didn't come out to you from England to be preached to. I should have thought you'd walked some of that out of your system. How much ground was it you covered ?

STEPHEN : Something over a thousand miles.

BILL : One thing you might have learnt in France and Italy—if what I've seen of 'em is anything to go by—is not to snivel over the Bible.

STEPHEN : It's a left-over from the hard-boiled Protestants I was brought up with—like you, Bill. It's what was the matter with me in England. Sitting in the middle of a pond you may have the soundest views on being dry, but while you stay in the pond you remain wet.

BILL : So the latest move will be—but what the hell are you, if not an Englishman ?

STEPHEN : I'm English all right—and I'm going back there.

BILL : Glad to hear it. Let's start by having some dinner. We shall be late (*peering at his watch*).

STEPHEN : *Let* us be late. Here is the earth (*extending his arms*) ; can't you feel the ball of it rolling on its axis, with nothing but a film of air between us and eternity—the days passing, and death near—the moment present, never to return ? What is dinner ! (*with a laugh*).

BILL : A good Catholic custom : don't forget that.

STEPHEN : So it is to fast and pray.

BILL : Oh, Lord ! If we don't get a move on soon we shall get lost in the woods. Damned confusing country, even in the daylight.

STEPHEN : We *have* got lost !

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BILL : No, I don't think so. I can find my way back, if it doesn't get quite dark.

STEPHEN : Dear old literal Bill ! We—northern Europeans—have got lost. There was a clearing, made with axe and fire ; we've let the wood grow again . . . Bill (*touching his shoulder*)—make an effort of imagination.

BILL : I'll do my best (*very forbearing*).

STEPHEN : Make such an effort of imagination as you've never made in your life.

BILL : Deep breath, heels together.

STEPHEN : Laugh away. I'm going to startle you.

BILL : Go on, then.

STEPHEN : Imagine, for one moment, with all your heart and soul : that all this, symbolised there (*pointing to the Christ*), is literally and absolutely true !

BILL : Why, I suppose I've never doubted it. In church, I mean. I don't often go there. Come to think of it, it's years since I did. But it's not a thing a man thinks of much outside, is it ? What's all the fuss about ?

STEPHEN : Come on—let's dine ! (*taking BILL's arm*). When I made that effort, Bill, it laid me out.

BILL : Empty stomach, probably.

STEPHEN : Now, let's see. We go north west, don't we ?

BILL : Right into the sunset.

STEPHEN (*pausing*) : Towards Pamela.

BILL : And Rosa.

STEPHEN : And Poppy Miles, and Edgeware . . . He's finally deserted Pamela, Bill (*letting go his arm and facing him*).

BILL : I know. Rosa told me.

STEPHEN : All our lives mixed up. Warp and weft—and a pattern we can't see.

BILL : Why didn't you let her go ?

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STEPHEN : Just me. And one day—you'll smile—I hope to get her back. Changed !

BILL : I'm smiling.

STEPHEN : Not in London, with all its disastrous associations. Back to my origins : will she come to me there ? My first duty to myself, then to her, then my family, then to all the world.

BILL : Not done with the world yet ?

STEPHEN : No, I live in it.

BILL : The trouble with chaps like you, Stephen, is that you can't leave the world alone.

STEPHEN : We can't. It's what we're for.

BILL : And you'll be for it, all the time.

STEPHEN : Did you run away in the war ?

BILL : I didn't think I was Marshal Foch. I obeyed orders.

STEPHEN : Orders . . . if there were orders. To enlist !

BILL : Discipline. It would do you good. Though the Army, in peace time—

STEPHEN : Go along with you ! The Army I'm thinking of is perpetually in the field.

BILL : If you don't *come* along, we shall sleep in it.

STEPHEN : I've done that, lots of times, on this trip. Hear a confession, Bill ?

BILL : What is it now ?

STEPHEN : Ever been afraid of sleeping in a bed ?

BILL : No. Afraid of rheumatism. What's got you ?

STEPHEN (*whispering*) : Pamela has.

BILL : Bad as that ?

STEPHEN : All the time I was walking in Italy—on the road—as I ate—and slept . . . especially slept. Day by day, and week by week : at my side, meeting me as I turned corners, swimming up to me in lakes, sitting combing her hair in caves and shadows . . . inhabiting the bodies of chance women . . . even smiling at me through the eyes of Madonnas . . .

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BILL : Christ ! (*under his breath*).

STEPHEN : I've starved myself, and she was in my hunger ; I've drunk and she was in the glass ; I've walked till I fell exhausted—into her arms. Can't help it. Very well, then, Bill : into the fire again—for re-casting.

BILL : You continent fellows, once you've let go—! Try a week in Paris, all out, and see how you feel then.

STEPHEN : Ha ha ! What shall we drink to-night ?

BILL : Can't beat that white wine.

STEPHEN : A full bottle each, to our last evening ! Then straight up north, Bill—home ! With Pamela !

BILL : God damn you for a fool !

STEPHEN : God damn me if I fail ! (*he starts off rapidly into the sunset*).

BILL : Hi ! Give me a chance—(*following*).

The curtain falls to rise again on SCENE 2. Sitting-room of the WADES' house near Manchester. Long French windows with glimpse of garden ; doors right and left. Comfortably furnished in the style of forty years ago. Victorian (modified by William Morris), and partially brought up to date. Engravings after Landseer etc. and several Medici productions of early Italian masters. Books behind glass. A large easy chair for old WADE by the fireplace, and a smaller for his wife ; other persons sit upright—the daughters of the house invariably engaged on small needlework. Saturday afternoon, a little before tea. WADE, with a pipe on a small table beside him, has been reading aloud ; the book is across his knees, but he is dozing. MRS. WADE is frankly asleep. The daughters, with a friend of ELSPETH'S—MAY WARDOUR—are in a group on the other side of the room. MARTHA is hard at work ; ELSPETH and MAY occasionally exchange furtive hand pressures. MAY is a mouse-like person, taking note.

ELSPETH : How's yours getting on, Martha ?

MARTHA : Nearly finished.

MAY : That's the third set, isn't it ?

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MARTHA : Yes (*they work on in silence*).

MAY : Mrs. Falconer it going to take the refreshments.

MARTHA : I hope Mrs. Mann will be back in time for the jumble.

ELSPETH : Mrs. Lord's giving three pictures. Rather mean, I call it.

MARTHA : How ?

ELSPETH : The way she got them. She went to the artist, you know, and bought them for very little. Then she said, Now, Mr. Hay, I want you to tell me what these pictures are really worth, so that I can put the proper prices on them at the bazaar.

MARTHA : Well, Mr. Hay was glad of the money, I expect.

ELSPETH : He'd have been more glad to get their full price.

MARTHA : Then why does he pretend to be an artist, if he can't get it ? Men ought to have some honest business. Look at Stephen !

MAY : Hush. You'll wake Mr. Wade.

ELSPETH (*sighing*) : Poor mother.

MARTHA : You oughtn't to encourage Stephen, Elspeth. If you'd any real feeling for Mother, you wouldn't.

MAY (*whispering*) : Where *is* Stephen ?

ELSPETH : In his room.

MARTHA : Reading. And still reading. He never comes down.

ELSPETH : Is there anything wrong with reading ?

MARTHA : Not when you've done a day's work. And reading aloud is best ; then everybody knows what is being read. Have you the scissors ?

MAY : Here they are, dear (*taking them from ELSPETH*).

MARTHA : Stephen says he's got to study. If it was something definite, like engineering, or his Law, or anything, I could understand it. But the things Stephen studies have all been fixed by sensible people ages ago. As if there could be any doubts about society and religion ! Any one of us could tell him.

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MAY : Is it true that he's converted . . . ?

MARTHA : He says so. And that's worse than atheism. An unbeliever may be pitied, but to believe *wrong*—! It's quite on a par with Pamela.

WADE (*warningly—awake, as it turns out*) : Martha !

MARTHA : I'm sorry, Father. I didn't know you were listening.

WADE : I was thinking (*touching his book*). I should have hoped a daughter of mine didn't need to have me listening.

ELSPETH (*half whispering her protest*) : But there *is* Pamela.

WADE : And many other things that we do not discuss.

MRS. WADE (*waking*) : Stephen . . . Oh ! (*looking round*).

MARTHA : There—you've waked her.

MRS. WADE : I wasn't asleep. Where's Stephen ?

MARTHA : Upstairs, Mother.

ELSPETH : Pass me back the scissors, May.

MAY : Oh, thoughtless of me, darling (*handing them back*).

WADE (*resuming his reading aloud*) : "The aspect of the years that approach us is as solemn as it is full of mystery ; and the weight of evil against which we have to contend, is increasing like the letting out of water . . . The blasphemies of the earth are sounding louder, and its miseries heaped heavier every day ; and if—"

[STEPHEN *enters, some letters in his hand*.

STEPHEN : I beg your pardon. I didn't know you were reading aloud.

WADE : It's been our custom of late, Stephen, on Saturday afternoons. But come in, and talk to us.

MRS. WADE : Sit by me, Stephen.

ELSPETH : Letters ?

STEPHEN : I heard the post. Only for Father (*taking letters to WADE*), and one for me.

MARTHA : Who from ?

STEPHEN : Do you still read each other's letters ?

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WADE : There's no occasion for concealment here, Stephen. It is a pleasure to your sisters to read their letters out ; but for you, of course—

STEPHEN : Actually, this is the reason for my coming in (*holding up his letter*). It's from Pamela.

[*There is a slight change in all their attitudes : WADE stiffens, the daughters and MAY bend over their work, MRS.*

WADE *sighs audibly.*

WADE (*formally*) : Is she well ?

STEPHEN : Quite well.

WADE : There will be rain, I think.

MARTHA : It rained last Saturday too.

MAY : Oh, and Sunday—and Monday.

ELSPETH : I thought the barometer was going up.

MARTHA : It was falling again when I looked.

[STEPHEN *has looked from one to the other, and now goes to sit by MRS. WADE.*

STEPHEN : Mother ! Will you have a little sympathy for Pamela ?

MRS. WADE : I'm sure, Stephen, that if you had married some nice girl—

STEPHEN : But that's hardly the point, is it ?

MRS. WADE : I try to be kind to everybody. I've never seen Pamela. Perhaps if I did—

STEPHEN : That's what I thought (*looking at the letter in his hand*). Things may be different now. Can't we try to begin again ?

WADE (*intervening*) : I don't know what you are going to say, Stephen ; but— !

MARTHA (*her ears visibly pricked up*) : It will be something impossible—I know it. What has he been doing ?

ELSPETH : Whatever it is, if Stephen wishes— ?

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STEPHEN : Shall I tell you, Martha, what I have been doing ? I have been praying.

MARTHA : To say a thing like that in the drawing-room !

MRS. WADE : Oh dear, oh dear. I hoped, Stephen, now you've come back to us—

WADE : I don't think we can object to prayer, though there are suitable times and seasons.

STEPHEN : You *are* kind, Mother dear (*turning to her again and taking her hand*) : It was kind of you to receive me as if nothing had happened—

MRS. WADE : Oh Stephen, nothing *could* happen . . .

STEPHEN : I've been waiting for replies to two letters. One I had this morning, making an appointment which I shall have to go out to in half an hour. The other was Pamela's. This indeed forces me to tell you everything.

WADE : Girls ! (*They begin to gather up their work*).

STEPHEN : Please ! I've chosen a moment when you are all quietly at home, with the week-end for thinking things over. I want you all to hear.

MRS. WADE (*with a sigh*) : Sunday ought to be a day of rest—it used to be.

MARTHA : And it's the last day for coupling prayer with Pamela.

STEPHEN : Will you indulge me, Father ?

WADE : You see who are before you ; and while we have no secrets from May—

MAY : Oh no !—I mean, oh yes (*rising*).

ELSPETH : Sit down, May (*MAY sits, a little nearer to her*).

WADE : I leave it to the good sense of my daughters, and to your own proper feeling.

MARTHA : If he had any.

STEPHEN : Would you prefer to go, Martha ?

MARTHA : I shan't leave home for you.

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WADE : Martha !

STEPHEN : You must feel (*generally, but especially to WADE*) that I've thrown away most of my time so far.

MARTHA : You've thrown away most of Aunt Lena's money.

WADE : Martha, must I ask you again ?

MARTHA : Oh, I've no patience.

STEPHEN : God give *me* patience. I have been in terrible error, ghastly error : along with millions, for hundreds of years. And while so far from alone in the world in general, I am alone—in my effort—here !

WADE : I am glad, Stephen, that you have admitted error. I don't know what you mean by hundreds of years, though I agree about the million. Those Liberal principles which the world is forgetting . . . But in wishing to reform your life, in what sense are you alone—here ?

MARTHA : He means in this crazy conversion of his. As if it would last, or we should take it seriously !

WADE : You meant that, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : Not entirely, sir ; though Martha for once has understood me. I meant the peculiar sense of isolation, in one's own family, where all one's error is rooted.

WADE : You imply that *I* was the cause ? (*gripping the arms of his chair, as about to rise*).

MRS. WADE : Your father, Stephen, your father !

MARTHA : I knew it would be like this.

STEPHEN : Not the cause of my personal mistakes—if steps which have brought me towards truth were indeed mistakes ; and not you in any individual sense—

WADE : *What* are you talking about ?

MARTHA : He doesn't know. He never did know.

STEPHEN : We are the victims, all of us, of the misdirected religion we inherited. The effort I'm alone in, here, is to bring you to the sense of that . . . One begins at home.

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MARTHA: There!—I told you (*to ELSPETH and MAY*). Not content with his own nonsense—

MAY: But this—! (*clasping her hands*).

ELSPETH: Don't, May (*MAY lowers her hands*).

MRS. WADE: Oh, Stephen, all you were taught . . .

WADE (*calling for silence*): Grace—girls . . . Do I understand, Stephen, that you have the presumption to think of converting *us*?

STEPHEN: What else can I do? The time will come when I must leave father and mother—

MRS. WADE: Again!

STEPHEN: So while I am still with you—

WADE: Wait a moment, Stephen. I am putting a strong restraint upon myself . . . You have surprised me, certainly, by your proposed reversion in religion; but I am a man of broad views, and I will not quarrel with you on any matter of mere opinion—if you are sincere.

STEPHEN: Sincere! When it has been to me an anguish, a conflict with devils, the shadow of death itself!

WADE: It will be a sorrow to me, one of the many you have inflicted; an added grief to your mother, a shame to your sisters—

MARTHA: If anybody need know: for of course Stephen must keep it to himself.

WADE:—but one thing I will *not* have: that you bring discord into the house of your parents. Now, we will change the subject. Isn't it almost time for tea, Martha?

[*They rise. STEPHEN falters for a moment, then causes them to look on in amazement at his passionate outburst.*]

STEPHEN: And is this all you have to say about it?—about a revelation that changes the whole world, that goes to the very heart of things, that divides all humanity into opposite camps?—that time and again has rent Europe from end to end, that gives the lie direct to every theory, assumption or action that in the

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least particular conflicts with it ?—that is the clue to every war, to every so-called economic conflict, every social development, every thought, philosophy and government ?—that cuts like a sword into races, families, individual lives—is this called a religious *opinion* ?—are principles, broad or narrow, for one moment in the same world with it ? Are we not to quarrel, over what is no less than the opposition of God and devil ?—are we so much as to imagine the possibility of insincerity in such a matter ?—do private griefs and parochial shams weigh one straw in the balance, and shall God himself change the subject, who has posed it for all eternity ? Let it be a thorn in your side, a rent in your self-complacency, a ridicule of your social ideals, a byword among your friends and acquaintances—

WADE (*loudly*) : Stop this, Stephen.

MRS. WADE : Oh God, Oh God . . .

MARTHA : This is a pretty outlook !

ELSPETH : Are you mad, Stephen ?

STEPHEN (*pausing*) : Will you stop tides and seasons, Father ?—or stop this thing by which alone they have their movement and their being ? I have called on God, Mother, and he has answered me ! Yes, Martha : it is an outlook that saints have died for, and the powers of darkness have tried in vain to blind ! If I am mad, Elspeth, it is with one called Beside himself—I, with my little learning ! But from to-day I appeal from my ignorance to the holders of knowledge : I offer myself—I enlist, the humblest in that army called the Church Militant. (*He closes his mouth firmly, standing back*).

WADE : You offer ? You enlist ?

MRS. WADE : He's going to be a priest, Arthur ! (*clinging to WADE's arm*).

WADE : Is this true, Stephen—a priest ? You ?

STEPHEN : I go for the word of Command. As that shall be, I obey.

WADE : And your wife ? Have I to remind you of her ?

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STEPHEN : No, sir. She may stand in the way of my taking orders. I do not know.

MARTHA : Well, Pamela turns out good for one thing, at any rate. Take Stephen to a doctor, Father.

WADE (*this light breaking in upon him*) : Please be quiet, everybody . . . I think, my boy (*going to STEPHEN*) it might not be a bad thing to take your sister's advice. Forgive me : I hadn't realised it was like this. But I might have known it—from your boyhood. There has never been any case in my family, or your mother's (*MRS. WADE moans*). We must make allowances—and we do, Stephen. Don't be upset ; I blame myself exceedingly for not doing something long ago.

STEPHEN : It's occurred to you to put me under restraint ? (*forcing a smile*).

WADE : No, no. But a little rest and quiet, somewhere, with cheerful people about you—

STEPHEN : It will take time. And meanwhile I shall have proper counsel and instruction ; I am going, in fact, to my first interview this afternoon—it was appointed in the letter I had this morning. I had by no means forgotten Pamela : it was partly to speak about her that I came down. Mother, do you think you could find Pamela a room for a day or two ?

MRS. WADE : Pamela coming here ? (*shrinking back*).

MARTHA : That beats everything !

WADE : Will you explain, Stephen ?

STEPHEN : I wrote to her from Germany. I oughtn't to have left her as I did, but I was almost at the last gasp, and had to get away. I told her I must see her—if possible, make amends.

WADE : But when you passed through London— ?

STEPHEN : I could not go to her—there. I had come to feel a horror of London : the scene of everything between us . . . But here in the north, where I was born . . . and if you will forgive me, with you for moral support—

MARTHA : Has it a dawning sense of humour ? (*to the air*).

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STEPHEN : Well, I asked her to come down from London. She writes, to-morrow, or next day—she will wire, so that I can meet her. I can get her a room in a hotel ; but if it is not asking too much—

MRS. WADE : There is the green room. The little room at the back has only a single bed.

WADE : But do you consider, Stephen ?—your sisters !

ELSPETH : They are married, Father.

MARTHA : I won't be under the same roof with her.

WADE : I will not say no to you (*to STEPHEN*) ; if I have received you, I will not deny you your wife. But Martha is right ; and I do not choose that Elspeth either . . . Can you arrange, girls, to spend a day or two at your friend's ?

MAY : Oh ! We shall be delighted !

WADE : You see, Stephen, what lengths we are prepared to go to in helping you ?

STEPHEN : But I can't have this. I should be sorry, Elspeth, to turn you out—

ELSPETH (*quietly*) : I shall not go ; I shall welcome Pamela for your sake.

STEPHEN : I am grateful . . . (*visibly touched*).

WADE : You are my eldest, Elspeth : do what seems right to you.

MARTHA : I'll see to the green room being got ready. Shall I have your things moved, Stephen, or will you—

STEPHEN : Don't trouble ; we shall be in separate rooms.

MARTHA : Well ! (*stopped dead*). The servants—

STEPHEN : I don't consider the servants.

MARTHA : But we do. Positively indecent ! Mother !

MRS. WADE : It's all so strange, Martha ; people don't seem to do what they used to do. I'm too upset to think about rooms, my dear.

MARTHA : Then you, Father : will you put up with this ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

WADE : We have had to put up, Martha, and shall have to—
with much more.

MARTHA : If nobody else will talk sense to Stephen, I will.
Do you think, Stephen, that you can come here—

WADE : Martha.

MARTHA : But, Father—!

WADE : Martha ! (*Long habit prevails, and she leaves the room.*)

STEPHEN : Now I must go, or I shall be late for my appointment. May I, sir—may I, Mother—ask your pardons for my outburst a little while ago ?

MRS. WADE : Oh, Stephen, had we deserved it of you ?

WADE : Try not to excite him any more, Grace. I only wish, Stephen, I could think you so far responsible as to be pardoned. I shall not withdraw my hand from you. For you, my son, walking as you are from the traditions of your forefathers—

STEPHEN : Back to them, Father. To the traditions, the faith, of their fathers' fathers : from the division that has made us what we are, to the happiness that might have been . . . I shall be gone about two hours, I think.

He walks slowly out of the room as the curtain falls. Rising on SCENE 3, it discloses the room curtained and lighted, long after the evening meal. WADE comes in and sits with the book on his knee, a pipe in his mouth. ELSPETH, MARTHA and MAY are engaged again upon needlework. MRS. WADE's chair is empty.

MARTHA : How's Mother's head, Father ?

WADE : It will be better. When I left her she was asleep.

ELSPETH : Stephen not back yet. Are they keeping anything warm, Martha ?

MARTHA : No. If he can't come in for his meals he can take what's cold.

ELSPETH : I wonder where he is ?

MARTHA : If Aunt Lena could have foreseen !

GOD'S AMATEUR

ELSPETH : You'll never forget that money going to him.

MARTHA : I should think not. It should have been put in Father's hands, to be divided equally among those of us who deserved it.

ELSPETH : Read to us, Father ; from where you are.

WADE (*reading*) : “. . . how false is the conception, how frantic the pursuit, of that treacherous phantom which men call Liberty—” we know what Ruskin means by Liberty (*looking up*), but the possible confusion with Liberalism is unfortunate : the sense he intends should rather be called Licence—(*he resumes*) : “. . . Liberty : most treacherous indeed of all phantoms : for the feeblest ray of reason might surely show . . . the stars have it not, the earth has it not, the sea has it not ; and we men have the mockery and semblance of it only for our heaviest punishment.”

[A PARLOUR MAID *enters*.

MAID : Mr. and Mrs. Todd, sir.

MARTHA : *Mrs.* Todd ?

MAID : Yes, miss. (ELSPETH *looks startled*).

MARTHA : There isn't a Mrs. Todd.

MAID : He said so, miss.

ELSPETH : Anyway, do we want visitors—this evening ?

WADE : Will you tell him, Elspeth : your mother is unwell.

ELSPETH : Bill will understand (*she goes out with the MAID*).

MARTHA : Has Bill been getting married ? Had you heard of any engagement, May ?

MAY : Oh no ! (*excited*).

MARTHA : It's years since he's been to see us. Rather unceremonious to come again at this time of day, and bring a Mrs. Todd with him. But I liked Bill.

MAY (*in sudden enlightenment*) : Martha !

MARTHA : What ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

MAY (*whispering*): If it should be—I saw a look in Elspeth's face—

MARTHA: Hush—Father's there.

WADE: What were you saying, May?

MARTHA: I want a ball of cotton (*rising*): I've got some in my room. Talk to Father, May (*she goes out*).

MAY (*plunging*): Oh, Mr. Wade!

WADE: Yes, May?

MAY: I was saying to Martha—I was so interested in what you've just said. Of course I understand about Liberty; but we are all Liberals, aren't we?—and it's so confusing.

WADE: Think of the word Libertine, May, and the distinction will be clear to you. True Liberalism is merely doing right. Carlyle said, It is the eternal privilege of the foolish to be governed by the wise.

MAY: Oh, I'm so glad to know that! Only everybody seems to think they are wise, and are doing right—(*with a nervous glance at the door*).

WADE: And they *know* it is wrong. In the attempt to justify themselves—but you have only to look at the Opposition papers. There is One Morality; and but for departures from it there would be no conflict, no controversy. All Good Men mean the same thing.

MAY: Oh, what a comforting thought! I must write that down later. I've often been so puzzled.

WADE: There is our Teacher (*dropping a hand on his book*)—mistaken sometimes, I cannot always go with him, but in the main, he is a Voice to be followed.

MAY: They are being a long time; . . . (*She goes in again, as fearing a moment's silence*). Then tell me: why is it that some people, bad, wicked people like Socialists—often quote him? They do, don't they?

WADE: Wisdom is wide, my dear May: like the high road, which is free to the thief as to the honest man. The devil may

GOD'S AMATEUR

quote scripture for his own purposes. And largely, men do right in spite of themselves. Someone said, The greatest criminal on earth spends most of his time doing good.

MAY : Oh, how consoling that is ! I must write that down too.

WADE : But take heed how men let what is consoling cloud their vision ! In the end, to all wrongdoers, retribution ! It must follow as the night the day.

[ELSPETH *re-enters*.

ELSPETH : Father, I have something to tell you.

WADE : What is it, Elspeth ? Has Stephen come in ?

ELSPETH : He came in half an hour ago, and went up to his room. It isn't that. Rosa is here.

WADE (*standing*) : Rosa ?

ELSPETH : She is married to Bill Todd.

MAY : Oh, then it was !

ELSPETH : Yes, May ; I thought it might be, and I went out to make sure. Father ! I was afraid of any unpleasantness for Bill with Martha, but she's gone upstairs. Will you see Rosa and Bill now ?

WADE : I had said—that till Rosa expressed penitence—

ELSPETH : But now she is married ! Doesn't that make it right ?

WADE : It is a good thing. And for the good that's in it—I will see her.

ELSPETH : Come with me, May.

[ELSPETH and MAY *leave the room*. WADE *remains standing*.

ROSA and BILL *enter*.

BILL : Good evening, Mr. Wade. I have brought my wife.

WADE : Good evening, Bill. This is news. I give you all my wishes for your happiness—and welcome your wife.

ROSA : Not your daughter, Father ?

WADE : How often . . . and you would not.

GOD'S AMATEUR

ROSA : Will it be enough if I say how sorry I am for all the pain I have caused you ?

WADE : It is much.

ROSA : I have no more.

WADE : Your wrong-doing ?

ROSA : Bill has forgiven me (*seeking BILL's hand*).

WADE : Perhaps you asked *him* ? (*with trembling lips*).

ROSA : Did I, Bill ?

BILL : Yield a point, Rosa.

ROSA : I meant to. But I find—I can't.

BILL : You Wades !

WADE : You are of course one of us, Mrs. Todd. So old a friend as Bill—

BILL : If I am Bill, Mr. Wade— ? (*putting ROSA forward*).

WADE : My protest made, she is Rosa. Give me your hands, both of you. When did this happen ?

BILL : To-day.

WADE : And you are—going for your honeymoon ?

BILL : Not yet. I've been away already, and can't afford more time just at present. Rosa knows. We've taken furnished rooms. Before going to them—

WADE : You come to me. It is kind. I cannot ask you to stay now ; we are in trouble over Stephen . . . When I have told your mother, Rosa, and things are straightened out, you must come to us. This shall be a new beginning for you ; if I have order in my house, nothing shall be said about the past. But give me a little time.

ROSA : Goodbye, then, Father. Will you kiss me ?

WADE : Yes (*they kiss formally*).

ROSA : May I see Stephen ?

WADE : Will you ring the bell for me, Bill ? (*BILL does so*). Will you like Manchester, Rosa ? (*in conversational tone*).

ROSA : I hope to see it for the first time.

GOD'S AMATEUR

WADE: It is changing. Some of us are growing old. (*The MAID enters*). Ask Mr. Stephen to come down (*the MAID goes*). How is business, Bill?

BILL: Difficult, but we keep going.

WADE: We must see more of you. When you set up house-keeping, Rosa, your mother and I will contribute. You shall have what you would have shared with us . . . It should furnish your house completely, and well.

ROSA: Don't, Father (*touched*).

WADE: And when we are dead, you will have your portion . . . (*STEPHEN enters—he is white, as suffering from some severe blow*). Your sister is married, Stephen.

STEPHEN: My dear Bill! (*shaking his hand*). It has turned out for the best, Rosa.

ROSA (*looking at him keenly*): Has anything happened to you?

STEPHEN: Yes.

BILL: What's up, Steve?

STEPHEN: You knew my intentions, Bill. Have you told Rosa?

BILL: Yes.

STEPHEN: They are shattered.

ROSA: Tell me, Stephen.

STEPHEN (*lifting his head*): I went out to be an Apostle to my people and my country. And I have been told, kindly, gently, but with no manner of mistake—in effect (*with intense inward bitterness*), that no Amateurs need apply.

BILL: Won't have you, by George!

STEPHEN: Won't have me, Bill.

WADE: Do I understand, Stephen—

STEPHEN: Oh, I may approach, asking to be taught, like everybody else. But all those proud dreams of mine, all that my life seemed leading up to—to go out with a flaming banner, the latest of the saints! . . . Presumption, ignorance, folly!

GOD'S AMATEUR

I must pursue my private calling, whatever that may be, and look for no entry into ranks beyond me. I was told—with a smile, but I was meant to feel it—I was told—(*struggling to get it out*) that the place I had proposed for myself is not a place for softies.

ROSA : Poor Stephen (*but not able to hold back a smile*).

BILL : Rough stuff.

WADE : And so, my boy ?

STEPHEN : And so, Father, I humble myself before you, and beg your forgiveness.

WADE : You have it, Stephen. And if it were in my way to meet the person you have seen, I should shake his hand. A little while ago, Rosa, I was speaking to your sister's friend of the broad high road of wisdom, which is free to the thief as to honest men. I am glad to find that in the—the Institution Stephen has encountered, there are some to be much respected. Now let us say no more of this. When you come again, Rosa, I shall have talked to your sisters, and you need not fear—(*MARTHA enters*). If you please, Martha—

MARTHA : You have to know, Father. Pamela has arrived. Elspeth is talking to her in the hall.

STEPHEN : Pamela ? (*he hurries out*).

WADE : Yes, Martha : I had to know . . . Do you see Rosa ?

ROSA (*going to MARTHA*) : Can we make it up ?

MARTHA : I have to pack my bag, and have a cab sent for. This is no longer our house, it seems. Good night, Father ; I am going upstairs by the back staircase. (*She crosses the room, going out*).

ROSA : Reconciliation, Bill !

BILL : Don't you mind, Rosa (*taking her arm*).

ROSA : I don't—much.

[STEPHEN *returns, with PAMELA and ELSPETH. PAMELA is dressed in a kind of half mourning, and is carefully tactful and subdued.*

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : Here's Pamela.

PAMELA (*advancing to WADE*) : How do you do, Mr. Wade. I'm sorry to arrive so late—I must be putting you all to great inconvenience.

WADE : That doesn't matter.

PAMELA : I couldn't get away from town earlier. I expected Stephen would meet me, but I hear my wire has not come. Perhaps it wasn't properly addressed ; I've had in fact some trouble in finding my way here.

WADE : We are sorry, Pamela.

PAMELA : How nice of you to call me that ! May I call you Father ? It's what I've longed to do—if only I hadn't been so misrepresented !

WADE (*severely*) : I think you forget—

PAMELA : That the worst against me was said by myself ?
. . . But that wasn't true.

WADE : Not true ?

PAMELA : No. I was desperate ; I was trying at all costs to release Stephen.

BILL (*under his breath*) : Liar.

WADE : I hope this *is* true, Pamela. I called you by your name for Stephen's sake. I think he may need you.

PAMELA ! Then I am happy ! Rosa ! (*looking round*). Will she let me kiss her, Stephen ? Elspeth has been so kind already—

ROSA : I'm just going—with my husband (*drawing BILL to the door*).

PAMELA : But this is delightful. Do stay ! I had no idea—

BILL : Goodbye, Mrs. Wade. We may see you again perhaps.

PAMELA : But often ! You must come and visit us in London. How splendid, Rosa !

ROSA : Good night, Father.

WADE : God bless you, child. Be good to her, Bill.

[*They go quietly away. Eyes are on PAMELA.*]

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : I feel I'm spoiling your evening. And I have so wanted to be one of you all. I always wanted it, Mr. Wade—I mean, Father. You'll remember how I came to meet you, when Stephen—the dear, foolish boy—told me not to. It's my fate to be *l'enfant terrible* ! Oh, I have been lonely, since you went away, Stephen. I was almost making up my mind to be a widow, when your letter came. You see (*plaintively*), I had no clothes.

ELSPETH : I want to do my duty, Pamela, and make you welcome. Will you let me go up now to prepare your room ? I've had some food put in yours, Stephen. (*She goes out*).

PAMELA (*glancing at STEPHEN*) : Two rooms ? This is magnificence !

WADE : I am going too. It has been a trying day for us, and it's getting late. You are free of my house till your affairs are settled, but you will not expect us to make you in every sense an inmate. Let me wish you good night ; and you, Stephen—God speed. (*He goes*).

PAMELA (*sharply*) : Will you now tell me what all this means ?

STEPHEN : Could you have expected anything very different ?

PAMELA : But what you wrote !—you could never have asked me—to be received like this ! Is this what you call wiping out the past, making a new beginning ?

STEPHEN : I could speak only for myself.

PAMELA : Yourself ! Then why bring me here where I was to be insulted !—treated like an infected creature !—snubbed and doubted !

STEPHEN (*wearily*) : If you had wired me as I asked—

PAMELA : I did wire. I said so. Or if I didn't, what difference does that make ? Here I am, and you should have ensured me a proper reception. After all this time ! And my long journey ! And to a place like this, good heavens— !

STEPHEN : Shall we sit down, and try to be calm ? I have a lot to say to you. But if you are tired, and would rather sleep first—

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : Sleep . . . separate rooms. There is a door between ?

STEPHEN : No. They are in different parts of the house.

PAMELA : Indeed ? Another insult, and this time from you direct.

STEPHEN : I thought it necessary.

PAMELA : You'll think one room very necessary, if I am to sleep here at all. A great deal has to be understood before I do. You will choose—and finally.

STEPHEN : Will this tone help, if it is not to be final for *you*, Pamela ?

PAMELA (*a trifle sobered*) : Does this mean you will at last set me free ? It may not be too late (*she sits*).

STEPHEN (*coming nearer*) : Do you still see Mr. Edgeware ?

PAMELA : I shall tell you nothing—till I see my way a little clearer.

STEPHEN : Perhaps I can give you news. He has married again.

PAMELA : So you've heard that . . . Then perhaps you've realised how you destroyed my great chance.

STEPHEN : It could not have been happy ; there was love on neither side.

PAMELA : You are an authority on love !

STEPHEN : I should be—since I have never ceased to love you.

PAMELA : And it made our life what it was. But come and sit by me, Stephen. Love makes a woman weak—even when it has been such as yours for me.

STEPHEN (*sitting beside her*) : Tell me, I must know. Did you come intending to be my wife again—now, after all that has gone by, in every sense of that relation ?

PAMELA : I don't know in what senses. You must enlighten me.

STEPHEN : Faithful and loyal, a helpmeet : in sickness or in health, for better or for worse.

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : For better, yes ! I should never have looked to anyone else if you'd done what I, and every other sane person, wished. You had a career before you, and you threw it away.

STEPHEN : Need we go back ? I told you everything before we married—that my mind was made up ; that nothing you might say or do—

PAMELA : I thought marriage would make a difference. To a normal man it makes all the difference. You were very inexperienced. I'd done everything I could for you before—and failed. I hoped my influence in marriage would have had its effect.

STEPHEN : It was not ingenuous.

PAMELA : Love never is . . .

STEPHEN (*leaning forward*) : You acted—from love ?

PAMELA : But one may love so easily. I gave you love from the first days. You were fresh to me . . . Oh (*with a little seductive laugh*), how fresh ! But in marriage there is responsibility.

STEPHEN (*drawing back*) : You showed it !

PAMELA : It's my turn—need we go back ? I soon realised what a mistake I had made, and tried to remedy it—for us both.

STEPHEN : Your remedy was ineffective—as it was crude.

PAMELA : I was trying to adapt my means . . . but it seems I misjudged you.

STEPHEN : And I set myself up for judge. I wouldn't divorce you. I was wrong. The experience of two thousand years—

PAMELA : Haven't you *yet* come into the present time ?

STEPHEN (*sighing*) : It is all one—past, present and future.

PAMELA : Dear Stephen ! I have been a great trial to you (*taking off her hat*).

STEPHEN : Trial and error . . .

PAMELA (*kindly*) : Well, when you sent for me you had in mind— ? (*taking a mirror from her bag*).

COUSIN AMATEUR

BRUNNEN: Impossible thing! (desperately). Desperate ways for us. Come to Paris! I know you will marry me as over-comes my passion for your baby—(he moves away).

PAUREL: Come here, Brunnen (they walk ponder and big stick).

BRUNNEN: No no, Paurel. I will overcome it. You shall be free.

PAUREL: Come! Look at me.

BRUNNEN (turning violently): Why do you defend what God has made?

PAUREL: Well, we don't go naked. This was your favourite (holding up the greater puff). Come and smell.

BRUNNEN: No! (He sits in old Vian's chair, his face averted).

PAUREL: There! (putting the things back into her bag). Now I feel more myself. I was being considerate to your family, Brunnen. This does not hurt! But there are things more interesting underneath. You are not a Puritan (rings, always you exaggerate that you are. Now (approaching), never mind those little alterations. I'll stand behind you, so you won't see. That was not nice!—the worst doesn't reach you? (bending over him). What were the separate ways?

BRUNNEN: Mine a cloud. Why talk about it!

PAUREL: What was mine?

BRUNNEN: You might have married again (the words dragged out). A better man Edgewise. Had you no little taste? (turning on her).

PAUREL: I was mad, Brunnen. I was humiliated. My love had meant so little to you . . . (her hands beginning to titter over him). Yet I loved you—in my poor way.

BRUNNEN (his hands over his face): Now and then . . . it was not poor . . .

PAUREL: Brunnen! (her hands on his wrists—don't shudder—think only of the now and then. Dear!—don't you feel my breath upon you?

BRUNNEN (pressing her hands to his lips): Your hands!

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA (*whispering*): Have I denied you anything I could give?—Have I withheld from you anything I knew of love?

STEPHEN: Knew! If you had not known! (*starting away*). If I had known what you were doing to me! The image of you before me day and night, the feel of you in my hands, the scent of you in my nostrils, your kisses in my heart, your laugh deep in my soul! . . . Death at the bed-head, and a frantic escape—into imaginings more frantic—oh, hell, hell, hell,—damn, damn, damn!

PAMELA: Well! (*straightening herself*). Ungracious, to say the least.

STEPHEN: But it was not you only, Pamela! Before I knew you, out of my dreams . . . it is in me, *me!* (*tearing at his hair*).

PAMELA: Nasty little pig of a boy you must have been. And the prospect before me—very charming, is it not?

STEPHEN: Couldn't you leave me alone?

PAMELA: Come, I like that! When I had made no effort to follow you—left you to your own miserable devices, given you every pretext to get rid of me—and now come only because I was asked to. Well, I see you love me still, as you call it. You respond like the adolescent you always were. But I have enough self-restraint for the two of us, if it comes to that. What time is it?

STEPHEN: Time? What does it matter.

PAMELA: We must go to bed some time. I want to get out of these things—they don't become me. You must show me where the room is: I expect they've taken my bags up.

STEPHEN: We have settled nothing.

PAMELA: One thing is quite settled: that by your own will I am your wife still. It follows you are my husband. Very well then (*holding out her hand*).

STEPHEN: I won't go with you.

PAMELA: Not? . . . Then I shall undress and sleep here, and they will find me in the morning.

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : Pamela ! (*approaching threateningly*).

PAMELA : Good ! Be a cave-man ! Perhaps I shall respect you for the first time in my life. Come on ! (*putting herself forward*).

STEPHEN : No (*drawing back*).

PAMELA : And you know very well why !—you have only to lay a hand on me to become my slave. Are you going to be sensible ?

STEPHEN : In what way ?

PAMELA : I have told you. Come with me, or, if you prefer, I'll come with you. I shall follow, you know, if you leave this room.

STEPHEN : What do you want (*panting*).

PAMELA : Ah, now we are getting to things. I want what I have always wanted—an honourable position, the wife of a man who will make his way in the world, and not bring poverty and ridicule on me. It may still be done. Play your part, show only a sincere intention of doing so, and I shall play mine. I will wait patiently. I have had my lesson, and shall not repeat it. Is that clear ?

STEPHEN : Quite.

PAMELA : Then set something clear beside it. What do *you* want ? I will give it you if I can.

STEPHEN : If it were in your gift, Pamela !

PAMELA : Try ! I'll do my best to meet you half way. Let me have only a gleam of hope, and I will go quietly to the room provided for me—and not molest you.

STEPHEN : I've offered myself for a priest.

PAMELA : For a *what* ?

STEPHEN : Celibacy.

PAMELA : Good Lord !—this dishes me—

STEPHEN : But I must tell you the truth. That's ended. I was not altogether in my right senses, I think.

PAMELA : Have you come back to them ?

GOD'S AMATEUR

STEPHEN : I have to wait—a year, two years, three, any number of years. I am perhaps the stuff that saints are made of. So much was admitted. But the test is long, and very arduous. I am at present very far away.

PAMELA : This is a new light (*sitting*) ; I have to consider.

STEPHEN : The upshot is, I must either go back, if I can, to the Law—or find another profession.

PAMELA (*looking up*) : Any in mind ?

STEPHEN : None.

PAMELA : Your religion doesn't matter. Many successful men are religious. It may be the best thing for you ; knock out some of the vanity. As to the Law, you can study, you are a speaker, on one or two sides you are no fool. With me to keep you at it . . . Back to the Law ! Don't waste more time.

STEPHEN : Call it that—having sown my wild oats ! (*with a wan smile*). And at last, grown up.

PAMELA : Thank goodness if you have ! Then, Stephen (*rising with a friendly and more hopeful tone*), I devote myself to helping you.

STEPHEN : But wait ! It will be hard for you. These separate rooms—they are a symbol of the future.

PAMELA : You mean—that I am to be your wife and *not* your wife ? Really ! What do you suppose we are both made of ?

STEPHEN : I don't suppose. It's because I know.

PAMELA : Do you, Stephen ? (*with a little undulating movement*). You are sanguine.

STEPHEN : Then I shall go ! (*with return to violence*). Out of the house ! Follow me if you like. Which of us will drop first !

PAMELA : I shall certainly do nothing so foolish. Well . . . things are narrowed to a very simple point. I said I'd meet you half way, and I will. Show me to my room—and sleep peacefully in your own.

STEPHEN (*controlling himself*) : Thank you, Pamela.

GOD'S AMATEUR

PAMELA : But—I wish you had a sense of humour. I shall not lock the door.

STEPHEN : You believe, then—

PAMELA : Oh no, my dear, I don't believe—I am sure. I shall be ready in half an hour. Though you used to like to be with me—(*advancing as he retreats*).

STEPHEN : Keep off !

PAMELA : Oh, I would—if I could ! (*laughing*). But I no more can than you can.

STEPHEN : To begin it all again— ?

PAMELA : Why, of course. And you meant it all the time.

STEPHEN : No !

PAMELA : But you did—or you would not have sent for me. Your scheme, whatever it was—you didn't really believe in it. But you did believe in me. And here I am !

STEPHEN (*dropping into a chair*) : God's amateur—in all but this ! . . . (*he covers his face*).

PAMELA : And not so much of a professional, even then. My poor boy—my dear, unhappy, well-meaning boy ! There ! I've done tormenting you. There's no hurry. I'll lock my door after all . . . You can always knock.

STEPHEN : Let's make an end of this (*rising*). I simply don't know what I shall do. I was thrown all abroad by the collapse of this afternoon. And I expect I'm in want of food.

PAMELA : You've had no dinner ? Then no wonder—

STEPHEN : I must go slack for a while. I've been too much keyed up. To get down to something solid—to be an unpretentious wholly insignificant person—it will be rest.

PAMELA : Then go up, Stephen, and for God's sake rest a lot. Come home with me to-morrow, and I'll feed you up. You want good meals, wine, amusement ; you must go in for dancing. Don't be afraid of me ; I've got to learn how to make the best of you. I'll be content with a moral victory—if I can be moral in anything. I mean to set you a good example. Work, Stephen !—that's what

GOD'S AMATEUR

you've to pin your mind to. And something else, quite in your old vein. We musn't try to reform too suddenly: a leopard cannot change its spots.

STEPHEN : What's in my old vein ?

PAMELA : To save *me*. I've been on the brink.

STEPHEN (*seizing her hand*) : Oh, Pamela, if we can come together again like this !

PAMELA : Ha ha ! Don't mind me—but it is so funny !

STEPHEN : Funny ?

PAMELA : I hope so. A bright prospect otherwise, don't you think ?

CURTAIN.

WILLS AND WAYS

WILLS AND WAYS

Characters, in the order of their appearance :

CONSTANCE HARKER

MARTIN STOKES

JEREMY MURDOCK

MARGARET NORGATE

GILES NORGATE

A WAITRESS

Scenes : Acts One and Two, a room in the Savoy Hotel.
Act Three, an Office at the Works.

Subject : Some imagined reactions in England to American industrial practices, notably those of Henry Ford ; complicated by, and working through personal interests and affections, turning upon the terms of a will.

ACT ONE

Principal room of a suite at the Savoy Hotel, London. The feature, of course, is a large window overlooking the Thames. Doors right and left into other rooms, and the entrance to the suite, through a curtained archway, near to us on the right. At a table near the window sits CONSTANCE HARKER : a woman just over thirty, well dressed, competent, thoughtfully waiting. Writing materials and a telephone on the table. What she is waiting for immediately appears ; the curtains in the archway are parted, and a very able-looking man, some few years older—MARTIN STOKES—looks into the room. He has his hat and a dispatch case in his hands. CONSTANCE looks up.

MARTIN : Well, Constance ? (*smiling*).

CONSTANCE (*rising*) : After all these years, Martin !

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MARTIN : The man who brought me to the door told me to walk straight in.

CONSTANCE : Yes. They 'phoned of course that you were asking for me. Jeremy won't have waiters and people coming in to announce.

MARTIN : Were you surprised—my being before the time, and wanting to see you ?

CONSTANCE : Just a little, for the moment.

MARTIN : Not displeased ?

CONSTANCE : Of course not.

MARTIN : Mr. Murdock is out, I hear.

CONSTANCE : Yes, he's in and out all the time. He doesn't go far. Stops to look at everything that interests him ; comes up here, goes to sit downstairs. You know ! (*with a little laugh*).

MARTIN : It will have grown upon him in his wandering life. No expense spared, I see (*looking at the room*).

CONSTANCE : He does everything in a large way. No avoidable detail or inconvenience. That's my job.

MARTIN : Is he well ?

CONSTANCE : Very well. Wonderful man for his years.

MARTIN : And you ?

CONSTANCE : Very well also.

MARTIN : A trifle—entrenched !

CONSTANCE : Do you represent the enemy, then ?

MARTIN : I hope not. It's good to see you again, Constance (*advancing a tentative step*).

CONSTANCE : And good to see you, Martin (*coming to take his hand*). Put your things down. Let's look each other over (*standing near him*).

MARTIN : Excellently well ! (*admiring her*).

CONSTANCE : No change for the worse in ten years ?

MARTIN : And yet I should have said then, impossible for the better !

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CONSTANCE : A mutual approval. Yes—on the whole
(*appraising him with a smile*).

MARTIN : Not quite a clean bill ?

CONSTANCE : You look rather worn. Some wrinkles.

MARTIN : It was hard work during the war ; not made easier
by the discredit of being a young civilian.

CONSTANCE : Do you worry about that still ?

MARTIN : Not a bit. The years after the war have been
much worse. Fighting against odds. The slump—strikes—one
thing and another.

CONSTANCE : But you look full of life, more so than you used to
—much more.

MARTIN : I *am* full of life—especially at the present moment
(*looking at her with meaning*).

CONSTANCE (*declining it*) : Good luck to your projects ! Have
you come to tell me about them ? (*motioning him to a chair, and
taking one at a distance*).

MARTIN : Not exactly . . . All that's for Mr. Murdock.
If it's a fair question, do you think he will rise ?

CONSTANCE : Not if there's a hook to it ! (*laughing*). But you
mustn't ask me : in matters of business I am just the secretary.
Jeremy doesn't get more communicative as he grows older.

MARTIN : He always had a down on me . . .

CONSTANCE : But surely not ! Didn't he leave you in almost
complete control of his old firm ?

MARTIN : After lifting me out of nothing. In fact, I owe
everything to him. .

CONSTANCE : As I do !

MARTIN : But he didn't like me—or I thought he didn't.

CONSTANCE : It's hard to tell.

MARTIN : As to complete control—it was also leaving me to
fight it out alone.

CONSTANCE : I can't hear anything against him, Martin.

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MARTIN : I won't say anything. You haven't asked me why I've come to see you.

CONSTANCE : But what more natural ? We are very old friends, and we shall have to meet several times over this business affair.

MARTIN : These ten years have passed in a flash. I have been occupied, tremendously. But most men find time to—to dream a little.

CONSTANCE : I hope it's a dream likely to be realised. Is she nice ?

MARTIN : I should say more than that (*looking at her*).

CONSTANCE : I suppose you would have me believe . . .
(*knowing it very well*).

MARTIN : Do you doubt it ?

CONSTANCE : So long ago ! And something so strongly against it, on my part. There must have been others ? (*returning his look*).

MARTIN : None, I assure you. Other women haven't existed for me. If from no other reason, I've been too busy.

CONSTANCE : Busy enough to have forgotten that old foolishness. Though I don't pretend it isn't pleasant hearing that you remember me.

MARTIN : What I came for—beyond wanting first to see you . . . was to ask if I might mention a name.

CONSTANCE (*frankly*) : Charles Murdock ?

MARTIN : That was it . . . Then may I add one question ?

CONSTANCE : I think you might ask me any . . .

MARTIN : Do you still think of him—so much ?

CONSTANCE : Ten years dead, poor lad ! Yes, I think of him—sometimes. But what you ask about is dead too. It could not long survive that rooting up (*with a slight shudder*).

MARTIN (*sensitive*) : I know—that terrible accident . . .

CONSTANCE (*returning to normal*) : I got over it, seven or eight years ago.

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MARTIN (*protesting*): I would have written—I would have come!

CONSTANCE: To the other side of the world? It wasn't possible, and I'm glad it wasn't. I could have given you no encouragement.

MARTIN: Why? (*in pain*).

CONSTANCE: Jeremy. (*He starts, looking at her closely*). Oh, not what that might seem to mean—if you thought so.

MARTIN: Forgive me. It was Mr. Murdock's name, coming on the top of—

CONSTANCE: It must have been suspected, now and then, going about with him as I do. I can only laugh at such an idea! Though we are usually mistaken for father and daughter.

MARTIN: Then why must you turn me down!

CONSTANCE: Don't put it like that, Martin! I don't turn you down, in any sense of liking or affection.

MARTIN: No other man? (*in renewed hope*).

CONSTANCE: Not to matter. Naturally, travelling about as we do—

MARTIN: Of course . . . (*swallowing his feelings*).

CONSTANCE: But I've been in much the same case as you. Anyhow (*dismissing this*) my answer has always been the same. I want to tell you the truth . . . You were partly the reason.

MARTIN: Though you could not know—that I—(*half rising, as to come to her*).

CONSTANCE: Oh yes, I could know—and did. Please sit down!

MARTIN (*obeying*): You have kept track of me?

CONSTANCE: Not so much I, as Jeremy. He has kept this to himself, but one knows, for all that (*looking at him closely*).

MARTIN (*with a slight laugh*): Have there been spies about me?

CONSTANCE: I'd advise no one to presume on ignorance in Jeremy! Well . . . You see how you have been in my remembrance. Indeed, you have been a stand-by to me; here you were, however far away I was—something to turn to at!

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from my long exile. And reality, to set against the nightmare of Charles—as it became.

MARTIN : It's noble of you to say so much. What's the matter ?
(*as she rises, as though hearing or suspecting something*).

CONSTANCE : Wait a minute (*going to the curtains over the archway and looking out*). Speaking of Charles, probably . . .
(*returning to her seat*).

MARTIN : What were you afraid of ?

CONSTANCE : Nothing. I thought I heard somebody. You were going to say— ? (*a trifle distraite*).

MARTIN : Feeling this about me—all these years, not even a letter ?

CONSTANCE : I wrote one.

MARTIN : I never received it !

CONSTANCE : You could not ; I tore it up. It was about Charles. He killed himself, Martin.

MARTIN (*shocked*) : Killed— ?

CONSTANCE : There was some frightful complication. I didn't know of it till two years later ; I don't know now what it was . . . It was Jeremy who at the time brought me the news of Charles's supposed accident. What he said was, My son is dead ; you must be to me my daughter . . . And when he saw that I was well over it, seven or eight years ago, he told me Charles had killed himself because he, Jeremy, had not permitted the marriage.

MARTIN : That was no reason !

CONSTANCE : There was more : something to do with Charles. It was past—one does not question Jeremy—I did not press it. But it was then I wrote you the letter.

MARTIN : If you had sent it !

CONSTANCE : Jeremy.

MARTIN : Again Jeremy !

CONSTANCE : And still Jeremy.

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MARTIN : He compelled you— ?

CONSTANCE : Not directly. But he knew . . . what doesn't he know !

MARTIN : How could you— ! (*with a gesture of protest*). And what possible motive in Mr. Murdock—

CONSTANCE : You are not thinking. The motive was, and is, a very simple one : he is attached to me, he is old and otherwise lonely ; very rich, and very fond of his own way. He has a certain power of controlling people . . . Why didn't you write to *me*, Martin ?

MARTIN : You had sent me about my—business. Double sense.

CONSTANCE : Twenty (*touching her breast*).

MARTIN : Twenty-five (*touching his*).

CONSTANCE : Things look final at that age. But when you grew older ?

MARTIN (*moving restlessly*) : My hands were tied.

CONSTANCE : Yours ?

MARTIN : Remember : Mr. Murdock had established me. I took the place in the firm designed for Charles. You had refused me, or I would not have accepted the condition.

CONSTANCE : What condition ?

MARTIN : As to any outward sign, to forget you.

CONSTANCE : You see ? The same motive at work. He bound you in loyalty.

MARTIN : A bond I am breaking, here and now.

CONSTANCE : It is time, perhaps—for both of us. (*She rises and goes into the window, returning with a changed manner*). All the same, I am attached to Jeremy, as he is to me. And I won't disguise that I have worldly interest. Tell me about your project. That's important : sufficiently so to bring us back to England !

MARTIN (*standing*) : You'll hear enough about the project soon. I want to have things straight with you first. Will you marry me ?

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CONSTANCE : You should not ask that : it's premature. Even if I could leave Jeremy, which I cannot—

MARTIN : At every turn, Jeremy !

CONSTANCE : I must send you away if you cannot be quiet and patient. It's Jeremy you have come to see, with the work of a lifetime to persuade him about—isn't that so ?

MARTIN : Yes (*clenching his hands*).

CONSTANCE : You must bear that steadily in mind. It would have been better if you'd said nothing to me till afterwards . . . or perhaps not—I may be wrong there. At any rate, you must be cool : least of all face Jeremy with feelings of resentment. Your future—and possibly mine—depends upon it.

MARTIN : Possibly yours. That steadies me.

CONSTANCE : No : something much more immediate steadies you—the project itself ! So far as I have grasped it—the whole correspondence has passed through my hands, you know—

MARTIN : I was sure of it. Something in the replies—

CONSTANCE : Well, so far as I understand the matter, I am on your side. Your best chance with me is to present your business plans as if I should have no part in them. Probably I shall, but I want my hands to be free. Will you do this for me ?

MARTIN : I will wait for you. Haven't I waited ?

CONSTANCE : You have ! (*taking his hand*). It's going to be a hard fight. And you will win.

MARTIN : I shall win (*looking into her eyes*).

CONSTANCE : Oh Martin (*with a little sob*), it has been so long . . . Forgive me for Charles !

MARTIN : My dear ! (*as she lays her head on his breast*).

CONSTANCE : And save me—from myself, from Jeremy . . . (*hearing a slight sound, she withdraws*).

[*The curtains divide, and JEREMY MURDOCK stands on the threshold.*]

JEREMY (*backing*) : I beg your pardon.

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CONSTANCE (*with self-command*): Don't go, Jeremy. This is Martin.

JEREMY: So I see (*an old man with whimsical manner and an iron will*). My eyes are not quite what they were, and you have grown older, Martin. But I recognised you; oh yes, I recognised you at once. A greeting of old acquaintances! (*with a swift glance from one to the other*). Am I late? An old man oughtn't to go wandering about, wasting others' time. Margaret and Giles are downstairs, Constance. I saw them come in. Shall I go to them and keep them waiting—till you are ready?

CONSTANCE: I am ready now.

JEREMY: And Martin too, of course. Wonderful places, these modern hotels, Martin: would have surprised my father. A hard man (*shaking his head*); they were like that in those days. Perhaps the present generation sees mine in much the same light. Am I a hard man, Constance?

CONSTANCE: Hard as nails.

JEREMY: Well, if anything is to be fastened down, the nails had better be hard. My treasure chest—eh, Martin? They're after it, those two down there.

MARTIN: I may possibly be under the same suspicion, sir. The need is capital—with your approval.

JEREMY: I had thought myself out of it, out of it. But you still need the old war horse, eh?

MARTIN: The regret of my life has been that you were not still with us.

JEREMY: Foolish, if sincere—which very properly it is not. The world to the young!

MARTIN: You sir, I am sure—

JEREMY: No occasion to be fatuous, Martin. Where are you going? (*to CONSTANCE as she moves towards the door*).

CONSTANCE: To welcome Margaret and Giles, and bring them up.

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JEREMY : Ah, yes. And Martin and I can exchange a few words. I'll ring. Have a waiter standing by, to bring you at once. (CONSTANCE *nods, and goes out*). So the old firm has been going down rather ? (*sitting, and motioning MARTIN to do the same*).

MARTIN : In spite, sir, of all my efforts. All the reasons have been fully reported in my letters—

JEREMY : And are very understandable. We old men tend to pride ourselves on what we did in our time, but we had not your difficulties to face. It's the difference between upgrade and down : the accident of one's date in history.

MARTIN : It's kind of you to say so, sir. But I do not recognise up and down grades. As I see it, it is simply a question whether a firm is or is not fully of its time. The chief difficulty is weight of tradition.

JEREMY : Or the weight of us old boys who hold so much of the stock and can't be got to move. Out with everything, Martin ! The old man my father liked plain speaking. He's the chap you've got to think of. For I originated nothing : I merely went with the stream of the later nineteenth century. *Laissez-faire*, we were still calling it—which only meant in eventual practice letting the other fellow get ahead. Your generation is paying the penalty.

MARTIN : You reserved your enterprise for after your retirement from the firm.

JEREMY : Enterprise of a kind—gambling, Martin. Pretty shrewd gambling, to judge by results, but gambling, notwithstanding. I found it congenial (*looking at MARTIN keenly*). My heart was never in the old business. I was forced into it, you see. My father ! You came to it fresh, and voluntarily. That has given you an advantage.

MARTIN : Still, the business has gone down in my hands. If it were not for what I hope to do, what I am convinced I can do, I should feel a failure. Do you wish me, sir, to enter upon my proposals at once ?

JEREMY : Wait till Margaret and Giles are here ; theirs is the paramount interest in Murdocks.

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MARTIN : I have always acted on that understanding—up till now, when it is necessary once more to refer to you.

JEREMY : You are not popular in that quarter, I believe ?

MARTIN : With Mr. and Mrs. Norgate ?—I'm afraid not. All went very well during the war and the boom—

JEREMY : When you were making money—naturally. Well, we shall see, we shall see (*rising to take a turn about the room*). But about Constance (*turning on him abruptly*).

MARTIN (*also risen*) : I beg your pardon, Mr. Murdock ?

Jeremy : For what ?

MARTIN (*smiling*) : Why, not “for” anything. I meant, of course—

JEREMY : That you didn't quite grasp the point of my question. I was late, no doubt. No (*looking at his watch*) ; I am still two minutes ahead of the appointment.

MARTIN : If you mean, sir, why I asked for Miss Harker—

JEREMY : No need for ceremony ; call her Constance.

MARTIN : I enquired for you,—and you were out. Not having seen Constance for ten years, I took the few minutes for renewal—

JEREMY : Ah, renewal. Yes, ten years is a long time. Room for renewal between you and me. You've had rather a hard task getting me to come over. I am complimented by your wanting me, but I wonder how we really stand towards each other ?

MARTIN : I stand to you, sir, as I always did : I am bound to you by the closest ties of gratitude and service.

JEREMY : Are those motives the ruling ones ?

MARTIN : There is interest as well. Believe me, it comes second, though I am looking to you for the realisation of my dearest ambitions.

JEREMY : Quite right. Want everything you can get—get everything you want. It's always been my way.

MARTIN : I can scarcely tell you how much my business projects mean to me. They are the outcome of years of thought and preparation. They are so wide in their application as to forecast

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a public work—in my eyes, a public duty. I have asked myself—I am swayed by them so much, and their achievement will be so arduous—I have asked myself whether I ought not to leave everything else aside . . . and indeed I have done so.

JEREMY : One, mastering idea. It sounds a little like sentiment, but business often hinges upon sentiment, too. I am familiar with the feeling (*patting MARTIN on the shoulder*), but in my case sentiment is a private sentiment. It is Constance. I am bound up with her. I am old, I have no settled abode. Break up my habits, and you break up me. I have to contrive to keep Constance. Keep . . . So you have a sense of public duty, eh ?

MARTIN : Not as apart from duty to the firm. The two things are identical, as I see them. And I hope that you may see it like that too.

JEREMY : At how much per cent. !

MARTIN (*smiling*) : Don't ask me to anticipate. I must begin with the facts.

JEREMY : Time enough then for the fictions ! Well (*pettishly*), where are these other interested parties ?

MARTIN : You said you'd ring, sir. Shall I— ? (*looking for a bell*).

JEREMY : Yes, do. The bell's there (*pointing*). I called myself a gambler, Martin (*as MARTIN returns*). Are you one, at all ?

MARTIN : Very little, I believe.

JEREMY : Yet, if I have any inkling of your projects—but we shall go into all that, go into it . . . There may be some fun with Margaret and Giles. You are too young for levity ; the joke will be on my side.

MARTIN : Joke, sir ?

JEREMY : One of the consolations of age. And there's another.

MARTIN : What is that ?

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JEREMY: Love of power. But a losing game (*shaking his head*), a losing game.

MARTIN: Won't you believe—

JEREMY: Rubbish. You all want to see the last of us. Quite rightly, too. But there'll be a final dance, with old man Jeremy in the middle. Look out, my boy, look out! (*with a motion of poking MARTIN in the ribs*).

MARTIN (*concerned*): If I have been so unfortunate as to have upset you—

JEREMY: Oh, no! (*planting his feet firmly on the ground*). I shall take a good deal of upsetting. Ask Constance! (*looking at him full*); she knows me. Ah (*as the curtains are parted admitting MARGARET and GILES NORGATE, followed by CONSTANCE*). My dear Margaret (*advancing*). How are the children? And Giles!—every inch a Don, come to set us all right. Great things doing, Margaret! A case for your intellect, Giles, if I am not mistaken. Have you broken the ice, Constance?

MARGARET: You don't look a day older, father.

JEREMY: They all say that, my dear, when the question of the Will is becoming urgent. It's made—all in order! Here's Martin Stokes, wanting to lay hands on the property. You have all the particulars, Constance?

CONSTANCE: They are in the table drawer.

JEREMY: Good! Shake yourselves out a little while I go to my room—to get the Will. We'll have it laid on the table: make a Parliamentary mace of it, sign that the House is sitting. Get through the preliminaries, Constance, and fetch me when you are ready. You look a trifle breathless, Giles (*pausing on his way to the door*).

GILES: You lose no time in getting to business, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY: Never postpone business, never postpone . . . I'm counting on you to tackle Martin: your theory against his practice. Give it them from the shoulder, Constance (*he hurries out by the further door on the right*).

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MARGARET (*looking at CONSTANCE*) : Has he been long like this ?

CONSTANCE : I've observed no alteration in him.

GILES (*moving towards MARTIN, who has stood aside*) : Good morning, Mr. Stokes.

MARTIN : Good morning.

GILES : Has Mr. Murdock given you any indication— ?

MARTIN : None.

GILES : To an old man, changes are unwelcome as a rule.

MARTIN (*smiling*) : And to others, sometimes ?

GILES : Ah, if you mean me, that depends on the nature of the change. (MARGARET and CONSTANCE *approach*). Here is the chief conspirator, Meg ! (*as a joke, and glancing at CONSTANCE*).

MARTIN : How do you do, Mrs. Norgate ?

MARGARET (*coldly*) : Good morning. There is no better news, I suppose, from the Works ?

MARTIN : Not what you would call better, I'm afraid.

GILES : No more strikes, I hope ?

MARGARET : It will be wonderful if there aren't. Concessions here, concessions there ! No good will ever be done till the men are taught their place once for all.

MARTIN (*good-humoured*) : I wish you could have the teaching for a month or two ! But I have my hopes, you know. I think I may be able to settle the question of strikes. Once for all is rather bold, perhaps, but I would go even as far as that.

GILES : A panacea ?

MARTIN : The word doesn't sound convincing. The action might be.

MARGARET : What kind of action, for example ?

MARTIN : Well—how about doubling wages all round ? And then, after a time, doubling them again !

MARGARET : Preposterous ! When you can't even now, pay a dividend !

MARTIN (*smiling*) : Exactly so.

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GILES (*as with quite detached curiosity*): This is interesting. You mean, that if wages were far beyond the utmost demand of the unions, the unions might be neglected.

MARTIN: Yes, I mean that.

GILES: And that, with so effective an inducement to work, the men would, in fact, work!

MARTIN: So I believe.

GILES: America, of course. Henry Ford. But are we not in England? The conditions—

MARTIN: *Make* the conditions.

GILES: Very good—if you include the whole disposition, the history and surroundings of a nation.

MARTIN: Looking forward, I include them.

GILES: Then there remains the one outstanding question.

MARTIN: And that is?

GILES: How to do it!

MARTIN: Precisely. (GILES *shrugs his shoulders*).

MARGARET: We are being played with. Mr. Stokes knows as well as we do that it can't be done.

MARTIN: I beg your pardon, Mrs. Norgate?

MARGARET: Do you seriously say that it *can* be done?

MARTIN: I do.

MARGARET: Well!—if it can, which I don't believe, it looks to me visionary, not to say immoral. The poor are the poor, and always have been. If they had these high wages they would only spend them in the public-house. The wages of servants, in my time, *have* been doubled—and look at the servants! No, I called it preposterous, and I repeat it. If this is the famous scheme you have to put to my father, I can only hope that he, with his evidently decaying powers—

CONSTANCE: May I recall to you what Jeremy said? Is there nothing you wish to ask me? He is giving you time, you know.

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MARGARET : Having very pointedly mentioned his Will. Of course we shall not ask—

CONSTANCE : It would be useless if you did ask ; I know no more about the will than you.

MARGARET : But you may believe yourself to be interested ?

GILES : I don't think that's a fair question, Meg.

MARGARET : I thought Constance invited it.

CONSTANCE : Certainly I don't avoid it. The will may, in Jeremy's eyes, be vital to his decision. The way he spoke seemed to imply that. I should advise there being no misapprehension on one point (*looking at MARGARET*) : his powers are by no means decaying, as the history of his operations will surely prove.

MARGARET : Prove ?

CONSTANCE : Yes. In asking whether there was anything you wished to ask *me*, I was thinking of the nature, and extent and convertibility of his investments. It is to show in what degree he is able to back Martin—should he decide to do so. He told me to say, that this being a family affair, he will lay his cards on the table.

MARGARET (*with trembling lips*). On the table . . . where the Will is to be. I don't know who may be regarded as the family—

GILES : Please, Meg ! This is a very generous action on Mr. Murdock's part. Few men of property would go so far as this. May we ask Miss Harker to proceed ?

CONSTANCE : If you will take chairs, I will sit at the table (*they re-group, sitting*). I have prepared a statement (*taking papers from the drawer*) : it is in duplicate—one for Mr. Stokes, the other for Mr. and Mrs. Norgate (*referring to the titles*). You will see that the papers are marked confidential, though that is unnecessary.

GILES : Quite unnecessary.

CONSTANCE : The lists are to be looked at at leisure, and returned—no copies having been made. I am carrying out my instructions, in the capacity of secretary.

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GILES : Quite.

CONSTANCE : Mr. Murdock made large sums early in the war—to be quite open, anticipating Government needs in the matter of supplies. Since then he has been dealing in what they call in America, Real Estate—in America itself ; and in other parts of the world. He has also Oil and Copper and Rubber, and other things. Realisation cannot be swift and easy. Liquidation must be gradual. In no circumstances will Mr. Murdock raise money through the Banks.

MARTIN : I entirely assent (*MARGARET sniffs audibly*).

CONSTANCE : It has not been easy to arrive at an estimate of total value. My figures must be considered as approximate. But the whole value may be judged as closely approaching a million.

MARGARET (*with a gasp*) : Million !

CONSTANCE (*calmly*) : There have been losses as well as gains. But speaking from such knowledge as I have, Mr. Murdock has shown himself to be extremely able in weighing up chances of success or failure. I think it may be held as demonstrated that his faculties are sound (*with a glance at MARGARET*).

GILES : Eminently so.

CONSTANCE : Then that is all. Will you take these lists ? Mr. Stokes (*handing one to MARTIN, who is in visible excitement*). Mr. and Mrs. Norgate (*hesitating between them*).

GILES : Shall I take it, Meg ? Though the interest is yours.

MARGARET (*overcome*) : Ours (*waving the paper to him*)—and our children's !

CONSTANCE : Thank you. I will now go for Jeremy. I may not be present at your conference. If that should be the case, good morning (*she bows to them all—they are for the moment speechless—and goes out*). MARTIN, *who has risen, goes into the window with his list, where he sits absorbed*. GILES signs to MARGARET to follow him to a distance).

GILES : I had no conception that his fortune—(*low voiced*).

MARGARET : A million !

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GILES : Yes, yes—but listen ! It has been announced for a purpose : no doubt about it. I can't help feeling (*glancing at MARTIN*) that this is ominous.

MARGARET : And that woman is at the bottom of it (*choking*).

GILES : Hush ! I entreat, Meg, for the children's sake ! It seems to me your father is inclined to support Stokes—

MARGARET : I must speak or I shall burst. Look at him, studying the list—as though already in possession !

GILES : For God's sake, Meg : quietly !

MARGARET : I can't. Mr. Stokes (*going back to him*).

MARTIN (*rising*) : Yes ?

MARGARET : You will understand that my husband and I may have a few private matters to discuss—

MARTIN : But of course ! I'll go into another room (*looking round, not knowing where to go*).

MARGARET : Perhaps this (*opening the door on the left*). Yes, there's nobody in here.

MARTIN : I beg your pardon for not thinking of it (*going into the room suggested*).

GILES : Injudicious (*as MARGARET returns to him*). Arousing suspicions. We cannot be too circumspect.

MARGARET : I don't agree. The strongest possible protest must be made at once. My dower in the old firm is as good as lost, and now what would put us on a splendid footing is to go the same way. A million, Giles ! I'm trembling in every limb. I must prevent my father—

GILES : My dear, my dear ! You are wholly dependent on Mr. Murdock's good will. Don't, I implore you, say or do anything to put his back up. You have not been a favourite with him—

MARGARET : No, there was another !

GILES : You are impulsive, not always discreet. Do recognise that this is a critical moment—a most critical moment. I only wanted to warn you : a word should have been sufficient. Say

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as little as you possibly can. Say nothing, till we know exactly how we stand. Leave it to me to question Martin Stokes—leave everything at first to me. Put a firm control on yourself. I don't think you yet fully realise how much depends on it.

MARGARET : How much, how much ? Everything depends on our nipping the whole thing in the bud. To throw it away in wages—in *wages* !

GILES : That can be only one side of the matter. Martin is not a complete fool !—he must have constructive proposals to face Mr. Murdock with. Your father, who is certainly not a man to be carried off his feet, will exercise his own judgment whatever protest you may make. And if you allow him to be still further prejudiced against you—if you do anything to show that you are thinking about his Will—

MARGARET : But what else can I be thinking about !

GILES : Think about it indeed !—*think* about it exclusively, and say nothing ! Don't forget it for a moment, but bend your whole mind upon keeping quiet. If Mr. Murdock should decide for Martin—

MARGARET : He must not—we must not *permit* it—

GILES : Certainly, we must throw the weight of what influence we have on the side of a strict enquiry, at least—I mean to do what I can. But we are not business people ; your father will not pay much attention to what we say. If Mr. Murdock should decide for Martin, it will surely be because he thinks it will be sound business to do so ; we are not dealing with Martin alone, thank God ! And while maintaining our different opinion, it will be necessary for us to yield gracefully to *force majeure*. Take my word for it, Margaret : it will be entirely imperative for you to do this !

MARGARET : But the will—the amount of money ! The money is *there*, made ! Where is the *need*—now we know—for taking some horrible risk with it— ?

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GILES : Must I remind you that we know nothing about the will ? You speak as though the money were yours. It isn't—it isn't !

MARGARET : I have always looked forward—it must always have been understood—it has *got* to be understood—

GILES : You are not quite in a normal state, Meg. I enter into your feelings, but really you must not give way to them. The one, the only thing for you to do is to keep on the right side of your father. He will be back in a minute : I entreat you to pull yourself together, and be wise.

MARGARET : And sit down while this woman, this Harker, whom he picked up by advertisement, gets ahead of us ? It's no use, Giles. Take your own line. I'll take mine. You deal with Martin ; I'll deal with Constance !

GILES : After all (*despairing*) the interest is yours, not mine
. . .

MARGARET : And I'm going to make it felt ! Don't you see what's going on ?

GILES : In what way ?

MARGARET : Don't you know that she is supporting Martin ?

GILES : Have you any ground—

MARGARET : Ground ! Did you observe her face when you were talking to him about wages ?

GILES : I can't say I did.

MARGARET : A man—you wouldn't. I did, and I see her whole game ! I shall expose it. But you are right in one thing—
(*in more moderate tone*).

GILES (*reviving*) : Ah ! In what ?

MARGARET : We must go carefully. Wait, and watch.

GILES : I am unspeakably relieved—

MARGARET : I shall take a fitting moment. For your part, throw all the discredit you can on Martin's schemes.

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GILES : I mean to, very sincerely—with the one reservation I have mentioned.

MARGARET : Million, million . . . Why are they being so long ?—what is Constance doing ?—The way she has wormed herself into my father's life ! (*moving about restlessly*). I wish I knew more about his earlier days. Sent away as I was, as a child . . . There were old scandals, I know ; very successfully hidden—but remembering servants' talk when I grew up . . . rumours had got about. And there was something queer about Charles's death. If I hadn't been kept out of everything . . . Why did my father dislike me so ?

GILES : It happens in families, Meg ; parents and children.

MARGARET : I hope not with *our* children. Oh, Giles (*pausing before him*), wouldn't it be good to have this money ?—to know it was coming, I mean, if not to have some earnest of it for the children's sake. No more disgusting economies, no more pinching to lay by for education and their start in life !

GILES : Well, well, dear (*pressing her hand*) ; something considerable must come your way out of so much ; surely, whatever happens, out of a million.

MARGARET : I want it all, every penny of it. The more there is, the more I want it. And to think, to think—

[JEREMY *re-enters*, followed by CONSTANCE. JEREMY has a sealed envelope in his hand.

JEREMY : Where's Martin ?

MARGARET : He went into the next room, absorbed in the details of your property, father. Will you tap on the door, Giles ? (*GILES does so*).

JEREMY (*shrewdly*) : You were not absorbed, eh ?

MARGARET : We have been talking about family affairs. May we congratulate you on your wonderful fortune ?

JEREMY : One man's gain another man's loss. Well, Martin ? (*as MARTIN re-enters*).

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MARTIN : I'm encouraged to hope, sir, that in this mark of confidence—(*referring to the paper in his hand*).

JEREMY : Every confidence, with or without mark. Are you prepared now to outline your whole position ?

MARTIN : It's what I've been anxiously waiting for.

JEREMY : Well, here is the person most nearly concerned (*bringing CONSTANCE forward*). I shall await her report with the greatest interest.

MARTIN : But—am I to understand— ? (*pausing in dismay*).

JEREMY : As I get older I like to have things presented to me quietly and in the briefest form. By the way, here is the Will (*laying the envelope on the table*). It will serve to represent me ! Constance will tell me about everything (*comfortably*)—when she brings me her decision.

MARGARET (*involuntarily*) : Her decision ?

JEREMY : Why, yes, she will have something to say on the subject. You'll all stay to lunch, of course ? (*turning, as he moves towards the door*). Famous restaurant, downstairs. Constance will be hostess—

MARGARET : But, father— !

MARTIN : Can you really intend, sir— ?

JEREMY : Oh, no—no place for me : I'll have a quiet chop somewhere. I'm going out now, to see what London looks like after this long absence.

MARTIN : But, sir—

JEREMY : Oh, I should have explained : I grow so forgetful. Thank you for reminding me—the Will. Of course !—that is the whole point. You see, apart from my old holding in the firm—sadly reduced in value by this time ; the general depression, Martin !—apart from my old holding, everything is left to Constance. You see, then, that she is a person to be convinced. Very good head for business, very good head. Now is that all ? (*looking round*).

WILLS AND WAYS

MARGARET : I protest ! I—

GILES : Meg ! (*in warning tone*).

MARTIN : I confess, sir, that I am badly taken aback. Not as to the terms of your will ; I have no right so much as to comment upon that ; but because I had hoped for your personal interest—your experience—

JEREMY : Ah, but how much mere experience must be out of date ! Still, such as it is, it will come into play, come into play . . . Personal interest ? I am extremely interested. Very remarkable, very remarkable indeed—full of immense possibilities. If I take myself off you can get to work at once. London used to be beautiful in this sunlight. You have everything you want ?—pens, paper—

MARTIN : I can scarcely believe it to be possible . . .

JEREMY : Oh, come, what isn't possible in these days ! We used to set limits in my time, but you have changed all that. Why, only one thing is left to us : we may make new wills.

MARGARET (*her breath catching*) : Ah ! . . .

JEREMY : An open window, if Margaret is in want of air ? Look at Constance, with all this responsibility thrust upon her, —calm as an Alpine lake ! You've climbed mountains in your vacations, Giles ? Most men from the University have. I, nowadays, have to look at them from below. That, I think, *must* be all ? (*again turning at the door*). If I had a surviving son, now . . .

MARGARET : You have a grandson.

JEREMY : Charles was a promising lad : we owe Martin Stokes to his discernment in friends. Young men together at the Works—would have been partners—well, well ! Constance will show us what stuff *she* is made of. After all these years with me she might almost be called a chip of the old block. Don't anybody move : I can find my way out by myself (*he leaves them without more ado, going through the curtains*).

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MARGARET : Of all—(*an explosion is imminent*).

GILES (*standing before her and facing CONSTANCE*) : So we are to consider you, Miss Harker, as in effect Mr. Murdock himself ?

CONSTANCE : Will you all sit down ?

[*Watched by the others, she goes quietly to her secretarial table.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

The same afternoon. JEREMY and CONSTANCE sit in the foreground, JEREMY in an easy chair, CONSTANCE with papers on a small table at her side. It will be observed that JEREMY's eccentric manner is not for CONSTANCE.

JEREMY : Very clearly put. You have a sound head-piece.

CONSTANCE : I have only had to condense a little. Martin's demonstration was admirable.

JEREMY : How did Giles take it ?

CONSTANCE : Courteously.

JEREMY : Not convinced.

CONSTANCE : No.

JEREMY : Reserving his fire. What about Margaret ?

CONSTANCE : She said very little. Under control.

JEREMY : By Giles.

CONSTANCE : Probably. He kept looking at her nervously.

JEREMY : Was Martin nervous ?

CONSTANCE : At first. Acutely disappointed by your absence. He warmed up after.

JEREMY : With your help ?

CONSTANCE : He needed none.

JEREMY : Well, the little that Margaret did say ?

CONSTANCE : Not worth repeating. I don't think she understood.

JEREMY : But trouble ahead ?

CONSTANCE : Some outburst, I daresay.

JEREMY : You don't consider her very important.

CONSTANCE : Is she—in this question ?

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JEREMY : An element. How long have we ?

CONSTANCE : She and Mr. Norgate have gone out for a walk ; they said they wouldn't be more than half an hour or so. Martin is waiting downstairs, ready for you to call him up.

JEREMY : You haven't given me your own opinion.

CONSTANCE : I express none.

JEREMY : I ask for it. Require it, then (*as she does not at first reply*).

CONSTANCE : My opinion is that the plans are practicable.

JEREMY : Enlarge upon that. No detail—general terms.

CONSTANCE : Product confined to one or two things in universal demand ; prices, for the high quality projected, beyond the reach of competition. In general terms one has only to say United States. The point—what leads me to use the word practicable—is ^{its} simply character, implying the required ability, and above all, the will to do it.

JEREMY : Yes, that is the point.

CONSTANCE : So far as I can judge from a mere verbal outline—based, it is true, upon what seemed very exact calculations—Martin has given an immense amount of thought and preparation to the whole question. He did not strike me as a visionary ; I should say that he had vision. We appear to be near the end of a particular epoch, and the next is forecasted. Martin is for a bold departure into the new.

JEREMY : Fanatical ?

CONSTANCE : Yes—if you rid the word of meanings that convey want of balance, and therefore force. Certainly fanatical as being possessed by supreme conviction. I take this character as essential to every hard undertaking.

JEREMY : So do I. It will have to be tested . . . Martin lays down a pet condition for success, of course.

CONSTANCE : He does. Without willing co-operation by labour—without very willing co-operation—he declares his belief

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that it can't be done. He is quite uncompromising here ; he must have his way as to wages, or he withdraws his plans.

JEREMY : Um . . . Speaking of plans, the concrete plans—calculations, blue-prints, and so forth—he didn't go far into these ?

CONSTANCE : The matter was too highly technical for his audience. The actual demonstration is for you alone, assuming your interest.

JEREMY : Risk—prodigious risk ! And left to yourself, you would take it ?

CONSTANCE : On confirmation of what is claimed.

JEREMY : Of course. You have, in fact, been very strongly impressed by Martin ? (*looking at her keenly*).

CONSTANCE : I have tried to make it appear so.

JEREMY : You have succeeded. At one time you had a less good opinion of him.

CONSTANCE : Always the same opinion (*with slight emphasis on the word*). And it has been much fortified.

JEREMY : Pity about Charles : you might have married Martin (*she does not reply*). Why don't you speak ?

CONSTANCE : Please, Jeremy : we are discussing a wider question.

JEREMY : I add this one : if Martin is not still eligible ?

CONSTANCE : It must be left alone.

JEREMY : If I insist here also ?

CONSTANCE : It must be left alone.

JEREMY : On compulsion ?

CONSTANCE : If I am to remain your secretary.

JEREMY : There you have me (*rising and walking to the window and back*). Won't you tell me ? Old affection, Constance !

CONSTANCE : You must judge if it is changed.

JEREMY : Do you want to leave me ?

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CONSTANCE : Cannot we, while business it before us, stick to business ?

JEREMY : Business, it seems, will stick to us (*sitting again*).

CONSTANCE : Yes, I had not finished. There is the larger aspect to this. The public aspect.

JEREMY : So Martin said. Does it concern us ?

CONSTANCE : All of us. It must be exercising many minds. It has come pointedly before us. What are we going to do about it ?

JEREMY : I know your answer : scrap—and start afresh. I ask where for !

CONSTANCE : We cannot tell. Life is Faith. When you see opportunity, take it.

JEREMY : I have taken much (*extending his hands and slowly clenching them*). And much would be taken.

CONSTANCE : All will be taken.

JEREMY : Damn you, it will. Not just yet !

CONSTANCE : Here and there, now and then, a new idea comes into the world. This, of making all share generously in the profits of a business, of such indeed being the criterion of success, is, it seems to me, a great one—the thing that is needed. It is worth the risk.

JEREMY : How much of this is Constance—how much Martin !

CONSTANCE : It is Constance, in full support of Martin.

JEREMY : And Martin, with shrewd designs on Constance (*with a slight chuckle*).

CONSTANCE (*ignoring this*) : Will you have the mass of men eternally poor—poorer and poorer, as we cling to ways that ought to be discarded ?

JEREMY : With the mass of men poor I am by contrast the richer.

CONSTANCE : Fallacy ! For let all become poor, and where are your riches ?

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : No fallacy, but side-tracking by you. I did not say "all."

CONSTANCE : It will mean all, when we have gone the way of Russia.

JEREMY : True, that was a danger. It appears to have passed. I have confidence in things as they are : they will last my time (*watching her narrowly*).

CONSTANCE : Your time ? (*rising indignantly*). It is short ! But you do yourself injustice (*sitting again*), to provoke my protest.

JEREMY : High wages, eh ? You really believe in them !

CONSTANCE : I do.

JEREMY : A fool with twopence halfpenny is a fool still with two pounds ten.

CONSTANCE : He is a fool fed, and clothed, and by his purchases helping to feed and clothe a score—not all fools.

JEREMY : The product, increased wisdom. Ah ! You are sanguine. Come back to business.

CONSTANCE : I will. Develop the home market.

JEREMY : The day of foreign trade departing . . . (*in thought*).

CONSTANCE : And returning—as other countries also look first to their own people. Everywhere, the higher standard of life.

JEREMY : Wages—mass production—work ! Increase the pace . . . Never mind where you are going—go faster ! Amusing.

CONSTANCE (*beginning to put papers in order*) : Shall I ring for Martin ?

JEREMY : You have said nothing about my will (*walking away, and turning to look at her*).

CONSTANCE : I have nothing to say.

JEREMY : Not even, thank you ?

CONSTANCE (*facing him*) : For a pistol at my head ?

JEREMY : Some might call it a desirable pistol.

CONSTANCE (*turning away*) : I do not.

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JEREMY : Very easy to lower it. A night train to the Continent, without another word to anybody ?

CONSTANCE : Shall I telephone to Cook's ? (*laying down the papers*).

JEREMY : Do. One never knows.

CONSTANCE : Will you go by Hook of Holland ? (*moving to the telephone*).

JEREMY : Yes, if you prefer that way.

CONSTANCE : I shall not be going.

JEREMY : Humph ! A pistol at my head. Put it down.

CONSTANCE : As you please (*returning*).

JEREMY : You are not being kind, Constance. Have I been such a bad—master ? (*standing behind her*).

CONSTANCE : No (*resuming arrangement of the papers*).

JEREMY : Saying nothing about what your life would have been without me, a pleasant enough existence, with an extraordinary recompense after a few more years' fidelity—

CONSTANCE : Please don't be pathetic, Jeremy.

JEREMY : What more pathetic, if you leave me !

CONSTANCE : Perhaps I shall not.

JEREMY : What will it turn upon ?

CONSTANCE : I don't yet know. Most likely, this business (*finishing with the papers, and putting them on the table*).

JEREMY : On business. Not upon me !

CONSTANCE : All our lives turn upon business.

JEREMY : Or business upon our lives ? (*with emphasis*).

CONSTANCE : Jeremy ! Set me free.

JEREMY : To do *what* ?

CONSTANCE : Merely, set me free.

JEREMY : All doors are open. Why do you stay ?

CONSTANCE : I do not run away from things. And you are near to me.

JEREMY : Affection admitted.

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CONSTANCE : A great deal of affection.

JEREMY : Curious, isn't it, this hold of an old man—and a million !

CONSTANCE : Very curious.

JEREMY : It can't be done, Constance. I won't set you free. (*He sits*).

CONSTANCE : Will you now see Martin, then ? (*rising in matter of fact way*).

JEREMY : Don't hurry me (*testily*). Do you want me to relinquish everything ?—money, power, affection, long habit—the son I lost . . .

CONSTANCE : Your son is dead.

JEREMY : I said so. You took his place, and you are living.

CONSTANCE : Am I to die too—as he died ?

JEREMY : As he . . . (*startled*). That would be a come-back on me, with a vengeance !

CONSTANCE : Oh, I don't mean physically.

JEREMY : I am obliged to you (*relaxing*).

CONSTANCE : Die to what alone makes life worth living.

JEREMY : You rate it so high—this freedom ?

CONSTANCE : The higher, as my time grows shorter.

JEREMY : You too, you too, feel the passage of years (*looking at her almost in hate*).

CONSTANCE : And shall grow old.

JEREMY : Look back when that day comes, and forgive me !

CONSTANCE : I hope to look back on a life needing no forgiveness : to myself, for being ruled by you a second time.

JEREMY : I saved you from misery with Charles. You have told me so. I needed no telling. I did not foresee his death . . .

CONSTANCE : I did not mean that time ; you were right there.

JEREMY : Ah . . . There was another ! Give me my will.

CONSTANCE : Here it is (*handing it to him*).

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JEREMY : Thank you (*weighing the envelope in his hands*). Now put it back (*returning it to her*).

CONSTANCE : I put it back (*doing so*).

JEREMY : The movement is not lost on you ?

CONSTANCE : Not at all.

JEREMY : Where would age be without money ! The humour of it : to see hopes rising every time one sneezes !

CONSTANCE : You think your hold on me is now the stronger—from having told me what is in that envelope.

JEREMY : I do, my dear. Don't you ?

CONSTANCE : In the sense that it has made me the more determined to fight you.

JEREMY : Consider that I have bowed (*with respect*).

CONSTANCE : You would wreck lives, to have your way.

JEREMY : I would, often have done so, and shall. We all do, who are worth our salt. You are proposing to wreck mine. We accept each other's challenge. You have never been of such worth to me as now.

CONSTANCE : Why ?

JEREMY : The sting of life ! Fight till you can fight no more ; then lower your head and say, It was a good fight. When I die, I wish to tell myself, No single thing have I forgone that I could have had ! That to me will be the rounding of good days.

CONSTANCE (*trembling a little*) : Have you never opened your hand—in compassion ?

JEREMY : Never. I have made myself comfortable by charity, in immaterial cases. To let go what I really wanted—I could no more do it than the cat, a mouse.

CONSTANCE : The simile is apt.

JEREMY : So, I hope, are all my observations.

CONSTANCE : Shall I ring now ? (*rising*).

JEREMY : You had a man told off to wait for the bell ?

CONSTANCE : As usual.

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JEREMY : Good girl. Ring.

CONSTANCE (*having rung*) : You are sure of yourself in all that's coming ?—no need for me to be specially considerate ?

JEREMY : None at all.

CONSTANCE : That is your power over me. If you weakened I could drop you like a blown-out match.

JEREMY : Call me a Roman candle (*pleased with his retort*).

CONSTANCE : The purely business side, with Martin : you are fully keeping that in mind ?

JEREMY : Fully.

CONSTANCE : I'm to maintain the part you've cast me for ?

JEREMY : If you please. You don't remember your mother, at all ? (*rising again*).

CONSTANCE (*arrested*) : How could I ?

JEREMY : No, of course not. But pre-natal influence—say in dreams. You are rather like her—but more like your father.

CONSTANCE : You knew my parents ?

JEREMY : Both of them.

CONSTANCE : In all this long intimacy, never to have mentioned it ?

JEREMY : A fact held in reserve, for possible occasion.

CONSTANCE : What do you mean ?

JEREMY : An old man, I must have known lots of people, before you were born.

CONSTANCE : Why do you tell me this—now ?

JEREMY : Perhaps it is the occasion.

CONSTANCE : Go on—and be quick ! (*glancing at the door*).

JEREMY : Your father had to be nameless. Your mother died. Secretly, I paid for your nursing, and your schooling. Charity, you see—one of the immaterial cases ! When you were grown, I advertised for a secretary, and saw you were put in the way of answering it.

CONSTANCE : I thought my mother left means.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : You were meant to think so.

CONSTANCE : 'Then *all* my life—

JEREMY : Beholden to me. Here is Martin (*as the curtains divide, and MARTIN comes in*).

CONSTANCE : I will be back in a few minutes (*she passes MARTIN without looking at him, and goes out*).

JEREMY : How one's thoughts revert to past time, Martin ! At your age, and with a clean bill of recollections—for you've been fairly straight in your behaviour with women, I take it ?

MARTIN : Really, sir, I have been so engrossed in business—

JEREMY : No entanglements. Wise man, but something missed, perhaps ?

MARTIN : My life is not over, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY : And mine nearly is (*with a sigh*). What can it feel like when one comes to die !—rage, resignation or mere senility ?

MARTIN (*awkwardly*) : I'm sure, sir, that in your case there is no need yet to think—

JEREMY : So it was said to Falstaff. He called on God. My father called for a glass of port, and died on a foul word to his nurse. One of the Victorians !

MARTIN (*trying to change the subject*) : Old Mr. Murdock was an original man, I've always heard. And a leader.

JEREMY : For his day. We'll see if I have any of the original blood in me. Come and look at the river for a moment (*taking MARTIN's arm*) ; I like to know what the tide is doing. (*They look out of the window*). Running up, or running down ?

MARTIN : Down.

JEREMY : Like the business.

MARTIN : The tide will turn.

JEREMY : So it will, so it will (*leading MARTIN back*). Now ! You want to get to grips.

MARTIN : Constance has given you a sketch of my proposals ?

JEREMY : An admirable one.

WILLS AND WAYS

MARTIN : Then may I ask, sir, if you—

JEREMY : Not so fast. Give me a chair and sit opposite me, where I can see you (MARTIN *places chairs, and they sit*). You look confident.

MARTIN : I am feeling so.

JEREMY : What in ?

MARTIN (*a trifle disconcerted*) : Well, I suppose first of all in myself.

JEREMY : Good ! That's the first requirement.

MARTIN : What's part of that, or I could not be here, sir, is confidence in what I want to do.

JEREMY : Which depends upon me.

MARTIN : No, Mr. Murdock—not at all (*as scoring a point*).

JEREMY : Oh ? Upon whom, then ?

MARTIN : You didn't exactly follow my words. My immediate hope of realising what I want depends upon you. The confidence itself has quite other grounds.

JEREMY : Come, come—hair splitting.

MARTIN : I am speaking precisely, feeling it to be necessary.

JEREMY (*drily*) : I am corrected.

MARTIN : I wish to make it quite clear, that whether I have or have not the good fortune to move you, I shall go on with what I have begun.

JEREMY : All right. A very proper spirit. Where have you begun ?

MARTIN : Once more, to speak strictly, in my own will !

JEREMY : Tut ! Is this the way to move me ?

MARTIN : I think so. Your question implied an actual beginning. That could not be without your authority, sir.

JEREMY : We are even, so far. I was trying to trap you.

MARTIN : I knew you were, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY : Develop that !

WILLS AND WAYS

MARTIN : You wanted to know if I have spent time and money properly belonging to the firm, and so to establish a claim on my ideas.

JEREMY (*chuckling*) : That was partly it.

MARTIN : I have spent neither. All my official time has been devoted to the old business, and such experiment as I have made—

JEREMY : Oh, there has been experiment ?

MARTIN : Of course. In a shop of my own building, with labour at my personal cost.

JEREMY : In the works ?

MARTIN : No—near my house. I have worked there in the early morning, and till late at night. For five years.

JEREMY : Energy. And prudence ! This labour of yours—what is it ?

MARTIN : A young American colleague, sharing my convictions and wholly with me. One or two unskilled workmen. Such engineering work as we have needed done—experimental parts—put out : at a distance.

JEREMY : And separately ?

MARTIN : Separately (*smiling*). Assembly by myself and colleague.

JEREMY : You have gone to work judiciously.

MARTIN : Thank you, Mr. Murdock (*sitting back for further question*).

JEREMY : You have, in fact, established the nucleus of an independent concern, which is your own property. What's to prevent your going on with that, irrespective of me ?

MARTIN : Nothing, sir ; except for two or three considerations. The first of these—shall I call it a moral consideration ?

JEREMY : What is it ?

MARTIN : It is, that I have always regarded myself as your man. In working on this nucleus, I have done so throughout with the intention to lay it before you when I was ready. It is at your disposition.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : On terms.

MARTIN : On terms. The second consideration is that while I am young, I shall soon grow older. Unassisted, it may take me many years to put my plans into practice. I want to get effectively to work with all my energies unimpaired.

JEREMY : A good point.

MARTIN : The third is, that in Murdock's we have a site, and an old-established business to push off from. My plans, indeed, are based on Murdock's. They involve a total re-construction, with new plant, and entirely new methods. For this, capital is needed.

JEREMY : My available resources might be sufficient ?

MARTIN : More than sufficient—for a properly cautious beginning. The new business should grow on its own earnings. I lay that down as one of the essential principles. Even so, I expect to go far towards paying you off in seven or eight years.

JEREMY : Seven or eight years—a coincidence !

MARTIN : I beg your pardon ?

JEREMY : Nothing. But, my dear Martin, if the enterprise should prove successful, I might not want to be paid off. Suppose I preferred to hold on ?

MARTIN : So much the better. We could double, or treble, our operations.

JEREMY : You would not object to old Jeremy's taking the bulk of the profits ?

MARTIN : Take all, sir, and leave me your salaried servant—at a figure, of course, proportionate to the turnover. Provided—

JEREMY : Ah ! Provided ?

MARTIN : Provided that half the profit, year by year, went back into the business.

JEREMY : Constance said you were a fanatic. You are.

MARTIN : I am. It is a religion with me. And this brings us to what must have been reported to you : my views on labour and wages.

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JEREMY : They have been reported (*nodding his head*).

MARTIN : I stand or fall by them.

JEREMY : Tell me : are your principles pure business, or is business to serve the ends of your principles !

MARTIN : Both, sir. I believe the principles will have to be applied sooner or later to save England from ruin. They are not *my* principles, except in so far as I hold by them : they are the coming spirit of our time, which we must either embrace, or go down. They serve at once pure business, and realisation of what alone in the future will make pure business any longer possible.

JEREMY : A mind made up . . . You look for a response in labour ?

MARTIN : An out and out response.

JEREMY : You may take a horse to water—

MARTIN : And if he is thirsty, he will drink !

JEREMY (*laughing*) : He will be thirsty, in another sense, after the work you will have to get out of him !

MARTIN : Let him be, in every sense,—when I have got the work.

JEREMY : If you get it ! . . . You do not reply ; you look stubborn and fierce. Well, that matter shall be looked into. Now, Martin, if I say to you, Not a penny from me—what will you do then ?

MARTIN : It will set me back. I must go on working, as I am, for some years more, laying by what I can. Then I shall begin, entirely on my own account, advancing little by little as I may. To the same end.

JEREMY : You will go on working, as you are. That is to say, Managing Director of Murdock's Limited. But if I decide to close down Murdock's.

MARTIN : To close down— ?

JEREMY : The same time and energy you have devoted to your independent nucleus might have saved Murdock's.

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MARTIN : It *was* to save Murdock's. The only way to save Murdock's.

JEREMY : You have turned pale, Martin. A glass of anything, if I ring for it ?

MARTIN : No, thank you.

JEREMY : Take a turn about the room (*rising*). I took one or two, just before you came in. And then we went to look at the tide.

MARTIN (*standing*) : Is this final, sir ?

JEREMY : Oh, no !—just playing with possibilities. And you forget : I left the decision to Constance.

MARTIN : Surely, sir, you cannot expect me to believe—

JEREMY : You should know me a little. Am I, in general, a liar ?

MARTIN : I apologise. But it was not the sense of my words to call you one.

JEREMY : What was the sense ?

MARTIN : That the decision must rest with you, into whatever mouth you put it.

JEREMY : Not altogether. For example, *Vox populi, vox dei*.

MARTIN : I'm afraid I don't follow.

JEREMY : Never mind. But we mustn't be too autocratic ; there are always others. Others, Martin ! Bear that in mind when you are earmarking my property.

MARTIN : Sir, is it not evident that I never intended to convey—

JEREMY : Convey, the wise it call ! Constance and I were talking of Pistols at heads a little while ago—if you take the allusion ?

MARTIN : I am distressed, and for the moment not quite myself. High hopes, and a sudden drop . . .

JEREMY : We must get Constance to pick you up again. Where is she, I wonder ? (*going towards the bell*). Ah (*as the*

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curtains are parted and CONSTANCE enters). We might almost think you've been listening.

CONSTANCE: I heard your voices, and waited for a pause. Margaret and Giles are back, Jeremy.

JEREMY: Then I'll go down to them and bring them up. Martin is a little depressed. We can't have that, you know—the chief mover! Encourage him, my dear. I'll do a small trot round, to give you time. And Martin!—pitch in a little more on the social aspect when we appear. If it doesn't entertain Giles, it will entertain me, to see him not entertained. Keep us bright; widen the horizon—that sort of thing, eh?

MARTIN: Whatever you wish, sir. You want me to work under every handicap (*forcing a smile*).

JEREMY: But think of mine—old age against your youth! My right hand man (*putting an arm round CONSTANCE*) going over to the enemy. Here's your backing—and what a strong one it is! Don't you feel a touch of pity?

MARTIN: I should use a very different word to describe my feelings.

JEREMY: You see, Constance, he is a bit down. Take him in hand (*pushing her towards MARTIN*). I'll get them to telephone when we are coming. (*He goes out*).

CONSTANCE: What has passed between you?

MARTIN: He is an old devil. I'm in half a mind to cut myself loose once for all—do everything with my own hands.

CONSTANCE: Can you?

MARTIN: I am still young. In five years—ten years—I might begin . . . (*sitting, his chin in his hands*).

CONSTANCE: And me? (*going to him*).

MARTIN: With a helpmate! (*looking up*). But I cannot ask it.

CONSTANCE: Ask anything. Face everything!

MARTIN: I'm as good as sacked.

CONSTANCE (*with assurance*): No. That cannot be.

MARTIN: Cannot?

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CONSTANCE : Not while I stand on my feet. And it would not be Jeremy. He has been bluffing you. In the business question he is on your side ; I am sure of it.

MARTIN : So I thought at first. Then he swung round.

CONSTANCE : His personal motive—to keep us apart. Don't let him do it ! And stick to your guns.

MARTIN : You mean— ? (*rising*).

CONSTANCE : Fight on !

MARTIN (*having crossed the room and returned*) : I will.

CONSTANCE : Give me your hand.

MARTIN (*moved*) : My dear.

CONSTANCE (*holding his hand*) : One word of assurance, dear friend : that if there were no other way, I would walk out with you—to poverty : strong in my faith for your eventual success. And if to no success, just the same.

MARTIN : This heartens me.

CONSTANCE : That's why I said it (*with a little shake, letting go his hand*). But my back is getting up, Martin ; I mean to beat Jeremy if I can. He's worth it. I've never admired him more than now, or even loved him. One wrong I will *not* do him.

MARTIN : What wrong ?

CONSTANCE : To humiliate him—by a blow beneath the belt, which our walking out would be. Now there's something new to tell you (*as they change position*). There is some mystery about my birth. Jeremy has given me a broad hint ; I won't tell you what, as I am not yet sure. I left the room to think. It's something that helps to account for his extreme attitude. Perhaps he imagines it will still further tie my hands. It will not, but it may strengthen *my* position with *him*.

MARTIN : I must not conjecture ?

CONSTANCE : Better not, even that. But be prepared. I want from you, your word to hold fast to your plans whatever happens—to let nothing divert you from taking Jeremy's capital if he will let you have it.

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MARTIN : He has repeated, that it rests with you.

CONSTANCE : Obviously, that cannot be. But if it rests with me, you have found your capital—accept it.

MARTIN : There is too much underneath this. You have said, Whatever happens. I must see what happens.

CONSTANCE : Won't you promise, trusting in me ?

MARTIN : No, Constance—for I do not trust you. You understand ?

CONSTANCE : You foresee some sacrifice by me ?

MARTIN : I have no right to foresee it. I do not. I will not.

CONSTANCE : Say that I would give my life for the public good ; seeing in you the audacity, the power, to break a hole in the wall of England's prison—to prove that tradition and habit are no more than habit and tradition—that it *can be done*.

MARTIN (*setting his teeth*) : It can be—and it shall—and by me.

CONSTANCE : And the means to do it—that is my part.

MARTIN : At what personal cost ?—What are you thinking of ?

CONSTANCE : Personal feelings have no place in this. The work must be done. I am your resolute disciple.

MARTIN : I think I see what you mean. I cannot assent to it.

CONSTANCE : The alternative—five years, ten years !

MARTIN : Fifty years !

CONSTANCE : Well, we must wait a little, then. I hoped for an understanding. We had better now be strangers (*leaving him, and going to the table*).

MARTIN (*following*) : Please, Constance, tell me exactly what *that* means.

CONSTANCE : It means simply this, Martin : that if you back down on accepting Jeremy's support, whatever the terms may be . . . I will never marry you.

MARTIN : I don't do business that way ; it is necessarily a question of terms. And you . . . are not business. .

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CONSTANCE : I was not, before you came, and filled me with the sense of what business might be. I am now—and you must take note of it.

MARTIN : So rapid a conversion ?

CONSTANCE : Isn't conversion always rapid ? I suppose I was ready for it : thoughts on my own account, waiting to be brought into action. It has happened to me, as it must happen to thousands as the idea spreads. I am caught up, Martin : I am no longer a merely private person.

MARTIN : I have done this . . . ?

CONSTANCE : If you have done it in my single case, how much more may you not do it with others—who have less to lose !

MARTIN : Have less to lose ? (*stepping back*).

CONSTANCE : Can you doubt it ? Don't you see what Jeremy's will is going to turn upon, and with it, all your hopes and plans ?

MARTIN : Good God ! (*dropping into a chair*).

CONSTANCE : Can you draw a sword, and not foresee bloodshed ? Can you profess a faith, and not contemplate the stake ?

MARTIN : For myself, yes—crucifixion !

CONSTANCE : And you rate me lower ? I am to be incapable of your example ? Shall I be the type of what you have to work in—I mean, your fellow men—and failing, forecast your failure ?

MARTIN : If you were a man, Constance (*jumping up*), to work along with me !

CONSTANCE : Perhaps I am something stronger—a woman, to set you upon your work ! Am I to despise you, as being more like a woman—the woman who, unlike me, clings and weakens ?

MARTIN : No, no ! (*clasping his head*).

CONSTANCE : Then put me behind you—as most surely I shall put you behind me if you falter in what you have to do !

MARTIN : Anguish !

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CONSTANCE : There, there, Martin (*touching him gently on the shoulder*). The worst may be avoided. Only, to avoid it, you must indeed be resolute. Stand up to things—put it over—deliver the goods ! Think of no complications : bend your whole mind upon carrying Jeremy with you. And for the rest . . . you have me at one with you in all you desire. Oh, my dear, that desire is not little . . . I will in no wise weaken on its fulfilment.

MARTIN (*trembling*) : I am, for the present, to leave love aside ?

CONSTANCE : Except as in our secret hearts ! I shall be looking on, I shall be listening and waiting—(*the telephone bell rings, she goes to it*). Yes ? . . . Yes . . . All right (*she hangs up the receiver and returns to MARTIN*). They are coming up. You are going to put all the punch into it that I have tried to give you ?

MARTIN (*after a deep breath*) : Yes . . . You are magnificent.

CONSTANCE (*laughing*) : Then my soul shall magnify the Lord ! I've a slogan for you : Wages, wages, all the way.

MARTIN (*catching on*) : Splendid ! Advertising value of your policy ! I'll head everything with that. Wages, wages ! (*laughing with her*). Service won't do in England ; it's blown upon, and derives from servile. But wages—it's a word to compel nine tenths of this country to sit up and take notice.

CONSTANCE : And the remaining tenth ?

MARTIN : To gnash their teeth—what's left of 'em. Decrepit, that's the word for most of the employers of Old England.

[JEREMY comes between the curtains, followed by MARGARET and GILES.

JEREMY : Laughing ?

MARTIN : Publicity, sir—a diverting subject.

JEREMY : A new experience for you, Giles. You don't have much of that in Cambridge ?

GILES (*smiling*) : Thank God.

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JEREMY : Well, you never know : we may see the Universities brought into line yet. Run for profit, on strictly up to date principles. Fellowships held by results—get on or get out. Here's the man you have to watch (*taking MARTIN's elbow*).

GILES : That is, in effect, what I'm here for.

JEREMY : Great man, Martin ; phenomenon of the age. Don't look upon him as just Martin Stokes : hear in him the voice of the future. All prepared, Martin ? Paint us a picture of the world to come !

MARTIN (*good humoured*) : Do you want me to lecture, sir ?

MARGARET : Cannot we be serious ?

JEREMY : But it's very serious—extremely serious. Bang goes everything ! You talk about the Industrial Revolution ?—Here's a revolution that is going to knock the old one end-ways. Forgive my style of speech. I'm trying to adapt myself. An appropriate remark might be Gee-whizz. Let's group ourselves about the phenomenon, and give him the floor.

MARGARET (*to GILES*) : I suppose we have to endure this ?

GILES : I think so (*they take chairs*).

JEREMY : Do you want the customary glass of water, Martin ?

MARTIN : I believe I can manage without.

JEREMY : Then give me an easy chair. Put Constance behind you to prompt, and be prepared to be heckled.

MARTIN (*when they are all seated, himself beginning in a chair*) : Well, as to the world to come, I don't think it is in any danger from going ahead. The danger is all the other way. We are committed to Industrialism, I take it ; and the only question is, what kind of a life are we going to make of it ?

JEREMY : Ah, what kind of a life ?

MARTIN : For any kind of life it is necessary to have money and some leisure. What gives us these, gives us everything.

JEREMY : Consider the lilies of the field . . . Excuse me.

MARTIN : Nature, sir, is the first exponent of standardisation and mass production.

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GILES : Oh, oh !

MARTIN : If lilies were not standardised, you could not recognise them as lilies. Another natural process, we are told, is elimination of the unfit.

MARGARET : What has this to do—

MARTIN : A good deal. You associate the word standardisation with ugly things : things which I am calling the unfit. Get down to the essential, inevitable lines of *use*, and you arrive at beauty. I am not talking about art. Art is a separate world, and I am not concerned with it : except that by arriving at the severe beauty latent in all effective use, you get rid at once of a mass of bad or spurious art ; and on the basis of plain, unadorned line—the line of maximum strength and minimum material—

JEREMY : The artist is relieved of dead weight.

MARTIN : Exactly. Art is art, and should not be anything else. Its application to things in common use is mistaken—as it would be in a good screwdriver. Yet a good screwdriver is a beautiful thing ; so is a well-balanced hammer. And all perfected materials are beautiful, if you leave them to their proper nature—any artist will tell you so. Here, for example, is a bit of material that is my own discovery and secret (*taking a small green bar from his pocket and handing it to GILES*). Not cold to the hand, you feel : an almost perfect non-conductor. Very light, very strong. Try to bend it—you cannot, you see. Take it away with you, and put it to any test you like.

GILES : Very remarkable (*handing the bar to JEREMY*).

JEREMY : What do you call this—a metal ?

MARTIN : I don't call it anything, at present—unless I call it an opportunity. A little imagination will reveal the variety of purposes to which it can be put. It is cheaper to produce than any material known to me : a combination of waste products. It will figure largely in my output. You, sir, at least (*to JEREMY*), see the possibilities in this ?

JEREMY : You should have begun with it, if its properties are what you claim (*putting on eyeglasses to examine the bar more closely*).

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MARTIN : I should have done so, if you had consented to hear me this morning. There are other novelties, not yet perfected, and awaiting your expert eye. For a general intelligence (*turning to GILES*), it's enough to say that many purposes now served by timber and the lighter metals—

JEREMY (*interrupting*) : Production of this might be a business in itself. Assuming, of course—

MARTIN : As you say, that its properties are what I claim. I ask for investigation. Then why not merely produce it, leaving the actual use to others ?

JEREMY : Why not ?

MARTIN : Because its value to me lies just there, in its use. It is to help me in my main enterprise. I disclose it now, merely as one indication that I am not a man of mere ideas.

JEREMY : What do you want *me* for ? (*rising to return the bar to MARTIN*). If what you say is true, you can pick up capital in the street.

MARTIN : Firstly, sir (*standing before JEREMY*), as I have told you before, you are my old and present employer. You made me. I recognise an obligation.

JEREMY : I thank you.

MARTIN : Secondly, with borrowed capital one is not free. Temporary difficulties may arise. Then, goodbye to my social policy.

JEREMY : But I am to give you licence—perhaps to make ducks and drakes—

MARGARET : No !

JEREMY : Margaret has spoken !

MARTIN : I hope to convince you, sir—to the extent of your coming in as a principal : not giving me freedom, but exercising your own.

JEREMY : On the lines, however, laid down by you.

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MARTIN (*firmly*): On those lines. If I cannot convince you, I will not have you in.

JEREMY: The high hand (*resuming his seat*).

MARTIN: Would not you, sir, take such a hand?

JEREMY: I am not to be allowed to, it seems; you are to take my money, and do what you like with it. That's what it all amounts to.

MARTIN: Then I have failed with you (*sitting*), and we need say no more.

MARGARET: May I say something? (JEREMY *turns to her*). If there is anything more in Martin's schemes than his craze for high wages, why hasn't Murdock's had the benefit? He has spoken of his employer. This new material must be his employer's property.

MARTIN: It's sufficient to say, it is not.

MARGARET: You have let Murdock's go down. Three years without a dividend.

GILES (*warningly*): Margaret!

MARGARET: Father! Will you let Martin—

JEREMY: I can't help myself, my dear. At least, we'll try a little flutter before we've done. But Martin can leave us out if he chooses. Go on, Martin. We've had firstly and secondly. Is there a thirdly to your wanting me?

MARTIN: Yes. It's not necessary for me to mention it here.

JEREMY: What do *you* think, Constance?

CONSTANCE: The reasons already given are enough. Martin has offered you the results of his independent, preliminary work. His proposals are sound, or they are not. The decision should turn on that question alone.

JEREMY: Any observations upon that? (*looking round*).

MARGARET: May I offer one or two?

JEREMY: Ah, Margaret has one or two! (*settling himself in his chair*).

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MARGARET : Apparently I am not in order if I speak about the business ; though as the largest holder in Murdock's I should have thought I had a voice. I will leave that side of it to my husband. I want to ask Mr. Stokes what correspondence there has been between him and Miss Harker.

JEREMY : Well, Martin ?

MARTIN : No correspondence.

MARGARET : What understanding, then ?

MARTIN : No understanding.

MARGARET : What was the motive of his private interview with Miss Harker before we came this morning ?

JEREMY : Had you a private interview, Martin ?

MARTIN : I saw Miss Harker : you know it, sir. But I object to the expression private interview, if any collusion is meant by it.

JEREMY : Are you satisfied ? (*to MARGARET*).

MARGARET : No. Will you put a question for me to Miss Harker ?

JEREMY : May I, Constance ?

CONSTANCE : Certainly.

MARGARET : Is Miss Harker, or is she not, on the side of Mr. Stokes in his proposals ?

CONSTANCE : I am.

MARGARET : Has she any special grounds for being on that side ?

JEREMY : Come, Margaret, Constance is before you. The third person is tiresome.

MARGARET : Please oblige me.

JEREMY : Ump. Any special grounds, then, Constance ?

CONSTANCE : The quite simple grounds that I think the proposals good proposals.

MARGARET : For whose benefit ? (*looking at JEREMY*).

JEREMY : Confound it ! Don't wait for me, Constance : answer, answer !

CONSTANCE : For everybody's benefit.

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MARGARET : I make my question a little more particular. Are there any—relations—between Miss Harker and Mr. Stokes of which we have not been informed ?

JEREMY : I will answer you myself, Margaret, *for myself*. I have not been informed, but I know, that Martin and Constance contemplate—relations.

MARGARET : Ah ! (*startled into speaking to CONSTANCE directly*). Is this true ?

CONSTANCE : Quite true.

MARGARET : And you, father, are quite satisfied about this ?

JEREMY : Why should I not be ? (*a threat in his voice*).

GILES (*restrainingly*) : Meg !

MARGARET : Please be quiet, Giles. I am fully confirmed in my suspicions by what we have just heard. Things indeed have gone further than I thought. Father, I want to put it to you, seeing how much is at stake : whether it isn't likely that all this has been very carefully planned—

JEREMY (*leading her on*) : Nothing more likely.

MARGARET : Martin's proposals coinciding with this understanding as to marriage, especially now we know the terms of your will—(*choking*).

JEREMY : True, the will.

MARGARET : In all these years she must have been working—first there was Charles—

JEREMY (*deadly*) : Charles. Go on.

GILES : I really should like to intervene—

JEREMY : Margaret has begun. She must finish.

MARGARET (*a little frightened*) : Perhaps I need not have mentioned Charles. I meant, that one hope failing, Miss Harker has twined herself more and more round your heart—

JEREMY : She has. What then ?

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MARGARET : And now, she and Martin together are trying to get your fortune out of your proper control !—to anticipate your death, and put beyond any doubt your not making . . . on seeing me, your daughter—(*on the point of breaking down*)—

JEREMY : Making ?

MARGARET : Making any later disposition, more in keeping with natural claims—with ordinary feeling—with the thought of your grandchildren—with my deserts, my expectations !—(*she bursts into tears*).

JEREMY : Your deserts, your expectations, eh ?

GILES : Now, Meg, you've had your say. Mr. Murdock will know how to make allowances—

JEREMY : If you can listen for a moment, Margaret—(*she is struck silent*). All this may be true. I give full weight to your interpretation, and shall try to do justice. There it must now rest. We have business still to do, and if you would like to leave us—

MARGARET : I'm sorry I broke down. I hope you'll forgive me (*composing herself*). It is true, and I'm glad I said it.

JEREMY : True or false, it does not at the moment affect what we are here to discuss.

MARTIN : No, sir.

JEREMY : Then will you continue ?

MARTIN : To do so, I must make believe that this had not happened . . . (*with strong self-suppression*). We were speaking of single control. To do what I want to do, the last ounce of all the energy I possess will be needed ; and if I am to get the best out of myself, there can be no divided mind.

JEREMY : Note is taken.

MARTIN : I need not enlarge upon the policy ; but to sum up—It is to confine the output to one or two things, resolutely standardised : a reversal of the old policy of the firm, which was to make to order what variety of things happened to be in demand. Having got down to the absolutely best design, that design is to supersede all others. I shall get down to producing at so low a

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cost that nothing will be able to stand against us. At the same time I shall pay wholly unprecedented wages, for an equally unprecedented return in willing labour. All this can be done, of course, only through really scientific management, and that will be my part (*looking round for question*).

GILES (*in the half pause, wishing to placate*): Speaking for myself, I daresay it may be done—in special circumstances. Whether it *should* be done, whether the established principles of industrial wage should be set at naught in this way, is another question. I see very grave dangers to the community at large. Such an encouragement of labour's already excessive demands—

MARGARET: Not to be condoned for a moment.

MARTIN: It will be both condoned and encouraged by me. The Political Economy of last century was made to suit the ideas of that century; it has no basis in natural law, and is quite out of date today.

GILES: Oh, indeed.

MARTIN: We are paying the penalty now of holding on to those ideas too long. They were expression in learned terms of the commercial will of that time. It is all a question of will; and I remind you of the old saying (*smiling*), that where there is a will there is a way.

MARGARET: Is this to go on? I should have thought that Mr. Stokes was scarcely competent—

JEREMY: To dispute with doctors? We must have a Chair of Wills and Ways at the University, Giles! Do you believe, Martin, that from these beginnings—?

MARTIN: The idea will be extended; first one, then another concern will catch on—and if we work it properly, come in! I forecast a vast combine, eventually of greater power than the Government itself; business, in fact, achieving its inevitable end, as the sovereign power. And for this reason (*with passion*), these beginnings are the God-given means of introducing a new era in human affairs. The mere commercial proposition almost passes conception, in the amassing of wealth; its use, the public use to

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which I shall put it, must, as the root idea is taken up and followed, absorb our unemployed, restore to millions their lost self-respect, and put a final end to the disastrous class war which is destroying us. And to that end (*sitting back with compressed lips*), I am dedicated.

JEREMY : Now, Giles, demolish all this for us !

GILES (*rallying his forces*) : I confess, my unassisted imagination had not gone so far. Business achieving its inevitable end as the sovereign power ! Forgive me if I take a rather long breath over that conception !

JEREMY : I don't know (*stroking his chin*) ; I seem to have heard talk about a Business Government. Was it Mr. Bottomley's ?

GILES : Humour compels me to fix upon the expression, The God-given means. As Mr. Stokes is the giver, he is asking us to dispute with God. I am scarcely equal to that undertaking.

JEREMY : Still, I don't know—all learning, in a way, is a dispute with God. I think you may be equal to it, my dear Giles.

GILES : I may, at least, perhaps, set God beside God : remind you, Mr. Murdock, of the cultural inheritance which has made us a nation. I was not born in America ; nor can I claim, as Mr. Stokes may do, that that country is my spiritual home.

JEREMY : You see, Martin, you are not original.

MARTIN : No, the principle has been tried out elsewhere—with some success.

GILES : Material success, admitted. With what eventual cost in degradation of the soul we have yet to see. I am not an unduly sensitive man, but I confess I shudder.

JEREMY : Professor Norgate shudders, Martin.

GILES : Gone the pride in craftsmanship, gone individual skill : a nation of machine minders, themselves soon to be nothing but machines ! As an Englishman, one justly proud of what generations of real workmen have given to the world, I could weep.

MARTIN : For their semi-starving offspring, drifting about the streets, you do not weep.

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GILES : I weep for the misguided policy that by doles and other effeminacy has led them to look for subsistence otherwise than in work.

MARTIN : Yet when I show the way to find them work, you complain.

GILES : *What* work—that is my point. Better unemployment than *wrong* employment. And for reduction of their numbers, Nature's way !

MARTIN : The semi-starved are to be wholly starved ?

GILES : It is their own doing : the cancer of Trades Unionism. What happens with cancerous growths ?

MARGARET : A little firm handling would bring them to their senses.

MARTIN : I am sorry (*dismissing this view*) : I conceive myself to be nature *plus* intelligence.

GILES : What you may conceive yourself to be, my dear sir, will not alter facts, nor redeem this country from the excesses of labour on the one hand, and the excesses of irresponsible industry on the other.

MARTIN : Irresponsible ? (*half starting up*).

GILES : Quite irresponsible—to the highly skilled, the free and great nation you belong to. You would reduce that nation to slavery—a slavery of the mind, a thing much more deadly than slavery of the body. To bring about such a universal standardisation as you desire, you must standardise also, character, morals, and initiative. If it be high priced slavery, so much the worse. A premium will be put on pure mechanism ; and England will decline rapidly into something not worth the name of a civilisation.

JEREMY (*cheerily, MARTIN not replying*) : That all ?

GILES : That, Mr. Murdock, is all.

JEREMY : Are you smashed, Martin ?

MARTIN : Not even interested, sir.

JEREMY : Then (*rising*), I propose to change the scene. One thing will interest me a good deal.

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MARTIN : What, sir ? (*also rising*).

JEREMY : To look over the Works ; see what you've been up to there, and take a certain line on my own account.

MARTIN (*in the general movement*) : May I be emboldened to think that this foreshadows—

JEREMY : Coming events, my dear boy, coming events ! . . . Can Cambridge spare you for another day, Giles ?

GILES : If necessary, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY : There's Margaret—don't forget Margaret's interest ! On the spot, you know, on the spot ! And there's Constance—and the Will, by Jingo ! Hand me the Will, Constance ; time it was back in my pocket. Thank you (*as she hands him the envelope*). We musn't overlook (*flourishing the envelope*) how private questions are mixed up with these public ones of Martin's. Very remarkable, all of this ; very important and very disturbing. I'm going to lie down—

MARTIN : You are going—

MARGARET : Leaving us without a word—

JEREMY : But Constance will make all the arrangements ! How many years since I was at the Works ! Some old faces left, perhaps. Quite a lot to see, Martin, and to think about. We must have you in Parliament one of these days.

MARTIN : Is that all you will say to me ?

MARGARET : Nothing settled— !

JEREMY : Mustn't be hasty, folks, mustn't be hasty. No place like the Works (*on his way to the door*) ; see you all there tomorrow. Oh ! (*pausing at the door*). Constance is my daughter. Illegitimate, I regret to say. (*He goes out, leaving them gazing at CONSTANCE*).

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

The office of MARTIN STOKES at the Works. It is a kind of observatory, most of the wall space being of glass; one looks out upon "shops" and chimneys. The time being towards sunset, and the spectator facing west, the various factory buildings show dark against a smoke-laden sky. The office is very plainly furnished; MARTIN's work table stands at the back and filing cabinets and chairs are placed at convenient points. A telephone on the table, no loose papers or books lying about. Doors right and left down stage. MARGARET and GILES are seated alone, with an air of waiting impatiently for developments.

MARGARET: Another day nearly gone. We shan't be able to get home this evening.

GILES: No help for it. We must see the thing through.

MARGARET: Why are they keeping us waiting? (*changing her seat restlessly*).

GILES: It can't be much longer now.

MARGARET: What's your impression of Martin's management? (*looking out of the window*).

GILES: Thoroughly efficient.

MARGARET: It makes me mad (*going to him*). Here's all the evidence of what ought to be a thriving business. I'm convinced Martin has deliberately let it down, to make a case for his schemes.

GILES: That's possible, I suppose. But we have to remember the depression of the past few years. Your father, who is surely competent to judge, appears satisfied.

MARGARET: My father! I'm ashamed to acknowledge him as my father.

GILES: Yes . . . The affair of Constance is a sad revelation. Concealing it so many years, and then announcing it as he did! We steer over deep waters.

WILLS AND WAYS

MARGARET : If Constance had any decency she would efface herself. I have the greatest difficulty in keeping civil. Do you think we could use this scandal, by threatening to make it public ?

GILES : Very dangerous. And not likely to do any good. I'm afraid there's not much to be done with Mr. Murdock. He will take his own course—haven't we seen how he *is* taking it !

MARGARET : Did you ever hear of anything more preposterous ? Bringing in the workers on a question of business policy ! When I heard him tell Martin to call a mass meeting in the canteen, I could have fallen down. To consult the workers at all—to say nothing of the bad moral effect of releasing them from their work to idle at a meeting—in working time—actually *paying* them to agitate !

GILES : I know. By the way, your father made an excellent speech ; and if I felt correctly the temper of the meeting—

MARGARET : What could you expect ? Wages will move that audience all the time. And it's to come out of *our* pockets ! For of course, if there is anything in Martin's plans for the business, *as* business, they could be realised without touching wages. It's gratuitous—it's a betrayal (*walking about*). What are other employers to do ? If wages here and there are doubled, there will be strikes all over the country for the same privilege. At the very time when it is agreed that wages generally *must* come down, the whole working population will be led to think that they can go up. A pretty state of things !

GILES : Margaret ! (*rising, and coming to her side*). I want to put a serious question to you. I have been taking note, and thinking of the future. Supposing Martin is right ; that it can be done, and that the profits will be very great. I say, supposing ! The example of America must surely give us pause . . . Supposing you, with your large interest in Murdock's, should be made by this alone a rich woman ?

MARGARET : Oh, supposing ! But isn't it all wrong ? (*struck, and looking at him*). Didn't you yourself think so ?

GILES : I did. But I am shaken.

WILLS AND WAYS

MARGARET : By this alone—a rich woman ?

GILES : Upon my soul, I begin to think so.

MARGARET : Well . . . after all, we are not necessarily concerned with other employers.

GILES (*in his turn walking about*) : You have used the word betrayal. It is a harsh expression. It may be it's we who have been betrayed—by a consensus of opinion, blinding us . . .

MARGARET : You mean, as Martin says, that wages must be made a feature in his plans ?

GILES : To get labour into line, for what labour is for—work ! A high price, for the highest output. So long as it's profitable ; that of course is what it all turns upon.

MARGARET : We have to consider the children . . .

GILES : The broader issues, as to loss of individuality and the rest, remain indeed untouched. But it is in any case the practice of our time to neglect them. Are we, as two modest, private persons, parents responsible to their children, to stand out on principle ?

MARGARET : To have had to give up our second car ! . . .

GILES : We may maintain an unfettered judgment, I hope. Might we not take a more decisive part for good *within* what is going on, than by criticism from outside ? I think we might . . .

MARGARET : You really think there is money in it ?

GILES : Let us be guided by your father ! If he is convinced, there is nothing to be gained by resistance, and much perhaps to be lost. In any event, you cannot be ignored ; and my advice is, that you identify yourself with Mr. Murdock's will. And as touching his will in the other sense—

MARGARET : I can't bear to think of it !

GILES : But you must think of it. Don't lose heart yet. The present will may not stand ; your father has hinted as much. Hush (*as a door opens*). Not a word about this !

WILLS AND WAYS

[CONSTANCE and MARTIN enter, MARTIN with an air of coming victory; he smiles, bearing no malice for the attack made upon him yesterday. CONSTANCE is composed and attentive. MARGARET sits down at the back as GILES advances.]

GILES : Mr. Murdock is not with you ?

MARTIN : He's coming; he asked for a little time to look about in, by himself. The ballot he proposed to the workers is now going on. Reports from the shops will be brought to me here, as the results are known.

GILES : We have been very much impressed by all you have shown us, especially by the visit to what you call your nucleus.

MARTIN : I thought you would be. There's a great feeling of reality in a factory. I don't think I could live without the smell of hot oil. We feel about it, I fancy, as men in the middle ages felt about their cathedrals; the whole weight of society behind one. Do you know at all what I mean ?

GILES : I believe I do. You go with the stream of your time. You are to be envied.

MARTIN (*smiling*) : Have you undergone a conversion then ?

GILES : Frankly, I have seen enough to make me hold my hand. Not that I supposed a doctrinal opposition could go very far. But you have really to reckon with the objections I tried to put forward ?

MARTIN : Undoubtedly. It will be the part of men like you to put the drag on mere materialism.

GILES : It is decided then, you think, in your favour ?

MARTIN : What do you say, Constance ?

CONSTANCE : I think it will be.

GILES : What about the Trades Unions ?

MARTIN : We have gone behind them to-day. There will be of course—shall I say, some doctrinal opposition ?

GILES : By all means (*laughing*).

MARTIN : We are going to leave them nowhere as to wages. We shall not increase the hours; in time we shall reduce them. They will put up a fight over output—and we shall beat them.

WILLS AND WAYS

GILES : Are they represented at the—er—ballot ?

MARTIN : Not officially. Practically, all we have said today is, will you accept a large increase in your pay ? They won't take in much more than that to begin with. It makes known our intentions, and will I hope induce a spirit—spreading the good news.

GILES : Tell me honestly—you see I am not now going against you—wasn't this early announcement a little premature ?

MARTIN : It was. I should have gone much more slowly. It was Mr. Murdock's doing, remember—he is nothing if not swift in his movements. He wanted a feeler—and an advertisement. I think he will get the advertisement !

GILES : The papers ?

MARTIN : I have people at work now, for a preliminary statement. We are only waiting for Mr. Murdock to give the word Go. Of course, the thing cannot come into operation at once ; I should put it at a year hence—or two, or perhaps even three. But the mere announcement will make some noise ; this country is waiting for it.

GILES : You look like a hound on leash.

MARTIN : I feel like one. I am in fact straining with excitement. I shall be glad when the next hour is over.

CONSTANCE : Sit down, Martin, and relax a little. Jeremy asked me to say (*looking at the others*), that he will want to settle all personal matters before you go away. Are you able to spare the time ?

MARGARET (*approaching*): Seeing that it's what we are here for.

MARTIN : I've ordered tea to be brought up (*he goes to sit at his table*).

GILES : This has been a severe day for you, Constance ?

CONSTANCE (*smiling at his use of her name*) : It has rather—Giles.

GILES (*to MARGARET*) : Can we make a little friendly gesture to your sister, Meg ?

WILLS AND WAYS

MARGARET : Perhaps she doesn't wish for one (*looking coldly at CONSTANCE*). She has made no overtures to me ; and indeed, why should she ?

GILES : In her sad and irregular position—

CONSTANCE : Please don't be under any misapprehension. I am not saddened by any irregularity. I was born, and here I am.

MARGARET : It may have been no news to you. In any case, you have made yourself very effectively your father's daughter (*she moves away*).

CONSTANCE : Thank you, Giles, for the olive branch ; but you see—! Excuse me (*as a GIRL in canteen uniform enters with a tray*) ; I must look after the tea (*conducting the GIRL to the table*).

GILES (*following MARGARET*) ; I'm sorry, Meg, that you could not yield a point.

MARGARET : I'm sorry too. I came up meaning to be different. But when she looks at me—when I feel how she is exulting over me—

GILES : You will regret it.

MARGARET : Am I to kiss her hand ? And will *she* yield a point—over the will ?

GILES : It's no use my saying more. You seem determined to do the worst for yourself. I repeat, you will regret it.

MARGARET : I cannot go against my nature. I am not like Constance, schooled for playing a part—doing everything with an eye to her interest.

GILES : If that were true, all the more reason—Ssh ! (*as the GIRL comes with cups of tea from the table*).

GIRL : Will you have tea, Madam ?

MARGARET : No thank you (*sitting by the wall, left*).

GIRL (*to GILES*) : Tea, sir ?

GILES : If you please (*he takes a cup and goes to MARGARET, spilling some of the tea in his annoyance as he sits beside her*). You should have had some tea ; it might have helped you.

WILLS AND WAYS

MARGARET : It would have choked me. Look at them !—
(MARTIN and CONSTANCE are taking tea, standing in the window
and looking out). They think it's their property already.

MARTIN : All that (*extending his hand*), to be rebuilt ! What
years of hard work went into it ! If it had been on the right lines
from the first—

CONSTANCE : Ah !—like Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds.
The opportunity of steam ! But it's the same in everything,
Martin. Life is perpetual struggle and readjustment . . .

[JEREMY enters on the right, taking off his hat.

JEREMY (*jovially*) : Tea ! What don't we owe to the Chinese !
Or is it in this case British enterprise in India ?

MARTIN (*putting down his cup and hastening to JEREMY's side*) :
I believe we have both, sir. Let me take your hat and coat.

JEREMY : And let Constance give me my tea. Shoo !—run
along, my dear (*to the GIRL, who departs*). Nobody but Constance
in things that matter. Have you an easy chair, Martin ?

MARTIN : This is the best I can do, sir (*bringing one forward*).

JEREMY : Excellent (*sitting*). I have been all over the works,
looking into the old shops. Pleasant to rest one's legs. And very
pleasant to take this (*as CONSTANCE comes with tea*).

MARTIN : Do you see much change in the shops ?

JEREMY : Not much. They were designed to last, and their
fate has overtaken them.

MARTIN : What do you think the result of the ballot will be ?

JEREMY : We shall see. And the result of other matters as
well. Just let me drink my tea, and then we'll get busy.

CONSTANCE (*to GILES*) : May I take your cup ?

GILES : Thank you (*he drops the spoon*). I beg your pardon
(*picking it up*).

JEREMY : Nervous, Giles ? Take pattern by your wife ; she
looks ready for anything.

MARGARET : You have prepared me for a good deal, father.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : Always hope for the best, and be prepared for the worst. Eh, Constance ? Thank you (*as she takes his cup*). Put them on the table, and then sit where I can see you. Very exciting, all this—very exciting (*as she goes to the table and back again*). Now, are we all ready ? (*rubbing his knees*). Just one remark, and off we go. I am an old man, presuming to take part in the affairs of youth. Say the word, and I will leave you to settle everything among yourselves. Any assent to that ?

MARTIN (*as nobody else speaks*) : You are the Head, sir.

JEREMY : The head and fount of smiles and tears. Plenty of smiles in the shops, Martin.

MARTIN : So I have observed, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY : Then sit down, sit down. And draw up your chairs a little (*to MARGARET and GILES*).

MARTIN : May I sit near the door, to receive the reports ?

JEREMY : Do, and read them out as they arrive. Good (*as MARTIN sits*) ; I have you all placed (*making a motion of counting them with his finger*). We'll begin by producing the Will. I have it somewhere (*he feels in his pockets, produces it, and lays it on his knee*). Being of sound mind, and so forth. So much is allowed of me ? (*looking at MARGARET*).

MARGARET : I hope of morals too.

JEREMY : By this time ; much virtue in *anno domini*. Speaking of morals, we may repose, I think, full trust in Constance and Martin ?

MARTIN : How so, sir ?

JEREMY : Marriage understood, I take it ; no example from an erring father ?

MARTIN : We certainly hope to marry eventually. I make no comment on the latter part of your question.

JEREMY : Dignity, and what is due to Constance. Very proper. Marriage and marriage alone is your intention.

MARTIN : I said hope, sir, not intention.

JEREMY : You may still be moved, then, by my wishes ?

WILLS AND WAYS

MARTIN (*after a moment's pause*): I cannot answer that.

JEREMY: But we must know where we stand. Don't you agree, Constance?

CONSTANCE: Yes.

JEREMY: Then will you answer for Martin? Come—hope or intention!

CONSTANCE: I cannot say yet.

JEREMY: But you have just agreed—

CONSTANCE: That there must be knowledge. Your intentions are unknown.

JEREMY: Precise. And stubborn as your father. Listen, Margaret. These two, contrary to my wishes, have proposed to marry. I had designed Constance for my daily and sole companion: whence this document (*lifting the will*). You see my wishes are in danger of being set aside. But they will neither deny their intention, nor affirm it. What does this mean?

MARGARET (*breathing deeply*): The will.

JEREMY: Well, Martin, what do you say to that?

MARTIN: I say nothing, sir.

JEREMY: I have to press you. If not the will, what is it?

MARTIN: If you press me—my personal honour.

JEREMY (*not unkindly*): Honour among—eh, Margaret?

MARGARET: Thieves. (GILES momentarily covers his face with his hand).

JEREMY: Plain English from Margaret!

MARTIN: Following you, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY: Very true. Dare I turn again to you, Constance?

MARTIN: No! You must deal with me.

JEREMY: I am trying to.

MARTIN: I have asked Constance to marry me. That is a thing distinct from every other consideration. It is not to be brought into the present discussion.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : I see your difficulty. Your tongue is tied. You mustn't be forced into damaging admissions.

MARTIN : I must not be forced, sir, into anything.

JEREMY : Into something definite, or we are wasting our time. I have shown clearly that I am against this marriage. What I want to know is, do you accept the full consequences of going against me ?

MARTIN : Apart from business, there are no consequences for me to accept or reject.

JEREMY : No consequences ? (*waving the will*). Do you force me, to force them on Constance ?

MARTIN : I wish to break up this conference, Mr. Murdock (*rising*). I thought we were to discuss the future of the firm.

JEREMY : We *are* discussing the future of the firm. Will you run away from it ? Sit down, Martin.

MARTIN : Will you advise me, Constance ? (*pausing for her answer*).

CONSTANCE : Please sit down again (*he does so*).

JEREMY : You see, Martin, you've got to go through with it. It seems to me you are trying to have things both ways—my support, while you continue to oppose me. Isn't that so ?

CONSTANCE : Let me put an end to this. We *are* trying to have things both ways. Better acknowledge it.

MARGARET : Ah !

JEREMY : A significant sound from Margaret ! Thank you, my dear. And thank you, Constance, for helping us a little forward. Capital notion, both ways, Martin ; it's how I am trying to have it myself. Well, here is my will in my hands ; you know its terms. Will you, on the strength of this remaining intact, definitely leave Constance to me ?

CONSTANCE : Don't answer, Martin ! Put your question to me, Jeremy.

JEREMY : Very well. Will you relinquish all thought of Martin ?

CONSTANCE : No.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : Will you wait for my death ?

CONSTANCE : No.

JEREMY : You know what you are doing ?

CONSTANCE : Yes.

JEREMY : I believe you do, and I will take you at your word. Therefore—(*holding up the will in both hands*).

MARTIN (*starting up again*) : Mr. Murdock !

JEREMY : Yes, Martin ? (*pausing*).

MARTIN : I cannot allow this.

JEREMY : You cannot prevent it. One moment, please ! (*as MARTIN is about to speak*). In your work you make calculations, but a time comes when you must test. Now and then you must test to destruction. So in human affairs. How do any of us know how we shall behave, till the case arises ? By the case I mean the accomplished fact. None of us know ! Therefore I do not speculate on how Constance, and you, and Margaret, and not least myself, will behave ; I do not say, such and such is what I should do in given circumstances : now tell me what *you* would do. I do it, and see : taking every consequence to myself, as I require others to take consequences, to them. I do it—and this is what I do (*he tears the will across and across*).

MARGARET : Thank God ! (*she sits back, almost fainting, GILES holding her hand*).

JEREMY : The first reaction ; Margaret gives thanks !

MARTIN : It must be undone. I withdraw absolutely.

JEREMY : You abandon Constance ?

MARTIN : I must abandon you, sir. I cannot have Constance disinherited through me. I beg you consider our business relationship at an end.

JEREMY : Present and future ?

MARTIN : Present and future. I resign from Murdock's, and I take back my application to you for the capital I need.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY: Humph . . . The second reaction! Come, Giles: we'll leave Constance till the last.

GILES: Do I understand, Mr. Stokes, that the firm is to be deprived—your special process—

MARTIN: Of all, Mr. Norgate, that is my individual concern.

GILES: My wife's holding, already so greatly depreciated—

MARTIN: I'm afraid will depreciate further. The firm, so far as my connection with it goes, will cease to exist.

GILES: Well, well (*regretfully*). We must see if we cannot do something for you . . .

JEREMY: Gone over to the enemy, Giles?

GILES: I do not see one, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY: You are to look to the rising star of Margaret, Martin, if I don't mistake! What has Constance to say on this development?

CONSTANCE: I have nothing to say, except that Martin's work must be gone on with. Don't accept his withdrawal, Jeremy.

JEREMY: Why shall I not?

CONSTANCE: Because the work comes before me. Martin has tried very generously to save me from poverty: to do so he will set back the hope of a lifetime. Does he think I shall permit such a sacrifice?

JEREMY (*to MARTIN*): Do you?

MARTIN (*to CONSTANCE*): Can I permit yours?

CONSTANCE: Wait a minute, as to that. Jeremy, from the first moment, has held us under the threat of his will. I knew it for a piece of paper.

JEREMY: It is now pieces of paper.

CONSTANCE: So it is; I will bring you a waste paper basket (*very coolly rising and doing so; he drops the pieces slowly into it, watching her face*). That gets one impediment out of the way (*putting down the basket and resuming her seat*). While that paper was intact, I was not free. The situation is now radically altered.

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : And what are you going to do ?

CONSTANCE : Use my freedom.

JEREMY (*quailing a little*) : Have I lost you, Constance ?

CONSTANCE : You have lost your power over me. And you know it.

JEREMY : You have lost—a million ! (MARGARET, *who has been listening, breathless, heaves a sigh of relief*). Eh ? (*sharply, glancing at her*).

MARGARET : Nothing, father.

CONSTANCE : I cannot have lost what I never had. I don't even know whether that envelope you have torn up contained a will at all ; I think it rather unlikely. (JEREMY'S *face is wooden*). I know only that you've been afraid in your heart that I was a time-server ; and so, up to a point, I have been.

JEREMY : You say so.

CONSTANCE : It was inevitable, I think—like your mistrust of me. Such a position can only be kept sweet by careful fictions and we have both dealt in them. What has brought me to reality is this conflict—Martin, me and you. I don't know all your mind, and I don't seek to know it ; I act from knowledge of my own. When I told you I would neither give up Martin now, nor wait, I was driving you on to what I expected you would do—make this demonstration over the supposed will. You were quite right ; it has cleared the air.

JEREMY : Margaret at least has been breathing—

CONSTANCE : Please, Jeremy : Margaret has nothing to do with this.

JEREMY : Have it as you like. Martin has, I take it ?

CONSTANCE : I am speaking to him as much as to you. And whether this will was a real one or not—

JEREMY : It was. And it is destroyed.

CONSTANCE : So much the better. I have need of nothing, except to see Martin established in what he has to do. He may

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call it sacrifice ; I call it privilege. Give him your word that you will support him in his undertaking, and I here formally renounce him as husband, lover—

MARTIN : No, no ! (*starting up again*).

CONSTANCE : You must listen, Martin (*he sits*). I renounce him (*turning to JEREMY*), and devote myself to you.

MARGARET : It's for money—a new will !

JEREMY : Silence, Margaret ! (*she shrinks back under his eye*). That will is finished with, once for all. Constance has no penny of mine. Go on, Constance.

CONSTANCE : You have said we must know how we stand. Very well then. If you refuse this, I shall walk out with Martin ; you will never see me again.

JEREMY : The test to destruction—come back upon me !
. . . Rubbish ! Do you think I do business in this fashion ?

CONSTANCE : It's your own choice. Let it be a matter of business, as it ought to be, and as Martin wished it to be, and I will take it all back.

JEREMY : Business . . . What's that ? (*as there is a tap as the door*).

MARTIN : It will be the first report on the ballot. I'll send the man away (*rising*).

JEREMY : Don't. Get the report, and read it to us.

[MARTIN *opens the door, exchanges a word with a messenger, and comes back with a slip of paper*.

MARTIN : There are two results here. Wood-workers, twenty-seven votes for, six against. Tinsmiths, eleven for, five against. In both cases a note, that question of hours and output remains to be gone into.

JEREMY : Some hesitation, but a large majority for. I'm a little surprised there are so many against.

MARTIN : Suspicion, sir ; they are afraid of a dodge.

JEREMY : Not without reason, as in profit-sharing. Well, we'll dismiss it from our minds for the present, and get on. (MARTIN

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sits down). 'Things have come to a head between me and Constance. There is one point gained ; I have proof of her sincerity. It might always have been money . . . What are Margaret and Giles thinking ? Giles has said nothing ; he has been lying low. What do you think, Giles ?—can I allow Constance to be sacrificed ?

GILES : I should see it with regret, Mr. Murdock.

JEREMY : And Margaret ? Come, let us hear Margaret !

MARGARET : You have said yourself, father, it might always have been money. I was sure of it.

JEREMY : And what do you feel now ?

MARGARET : If you tell me I've been wrong—

JEREMY : Tut, I don't tell you anything. I ask you.

MARGARET : You've asked if you can allow Constance to be sacrificed. I'm not sure she means any kind of sacrifice. She will devote herself to you—which is just what she has done before . . . and admitted that it was self-interest. I hope you won't allow yourself to be weakened.

JEREMY : Be explicit.

MARGARET : It's very painful . . . I can't altogether agree that Constance has proved her sincerity ; I feel there is more behind.

JEREMY : What behind !

MARGARET : That you might be induced . . . to make . . . your own legitimate flesh and blood might be thought to have a first claim . . . I can't go on ! (*in agitation*).

GILES : Won't you excuse her, Mr. Murdock ? Thoughts of the children—your grandchildren—

JEREMY : I have no right to press her—as I have pressed Constance. Flesh and blood has its claims, as Margaret has said. As to legitimacy . . . I had hoped to avoid raising this matter, but you must have the truth. There *is* more behind—behind me.

MARGARET (*in terror*) : Father !

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JEREMY : Don't call me father any longer, Margaret. You are not my daughter.

MARGARET : I am not— ? (*aghast, in a general stirring*).

JEREMY : Please be cool. It was bound to come out in any settlement.

MARGARET (*whispering*) : My God . . .

JEREMY : I don't go into past time, except to say that between me and my deceased wife there was an early division—an arrangement. As it was a private arrangement, I believe I was not relieved of legal responsibility. It was only Margaret's reference to flesh and blood—

MARGARET : You spring this upon me now— !

GILES : Meg—Meg ! (*laying a hand on her arm and watching JEREMY*).

JEREMY : You said you could not go on, Margaret : no doubt in a further blackening of Constance. I will take it for grace that you did not go on. Don't say anything now (*holding up a hand*). I wish, morally, to remain your father.

MARGARET : Morally ! (*in spite of GILES*).

JEREMY : If you think it would be better to take her away, Giles ?

GILES : No, Mr. Murdock. Be brave, Meg.

CONSTANCE (*in telling voice, through the moment's silence*) : Father.

JEREMY : Yes, Constance ?—I answer to the name, with you.

CONSTANCE : Charles ? (*MARGARET looks up with a start*).

JEREMY : I expected that question. Neither Margaret nor Charles was a child of mine.

CONSTANCE : Did Charles know ?

JEREMY : He did not. By silence, I lied to Charles.

CONSTANCE : Did you tell him about me ?

JEREMY : I told him.

CONSTANCE : And that was why— ?

WILLS AND WAYS

JEREMY : He loved you. He killed himself.

MARGARET : Oh, oh ! (*covering her face*).

CONSTANCE : Then, Jeremy— ?

JEREMY : In effect, I was his murderer.

CONSTANCE : Yes.

JEREMY (*rising*) : I did it to keep you for myself ! I did not foresee what he would do ; I knew it was no more than a passing fancy on your part. Still, that will, now in pieces, was to have been my recompense to you. I have had you for ten years—I hoped it might be till my death.

CONSTANCE : You have lived too long.

JEREMY : Perhaps. But I am still living ; very much still living . . . (*There is a second knock at the door*). More reports. It will do no harm to divert our attention for a moment. Oblige me, Martin, as before. (*He resumes his seat*).

MARTIN (*at the door, reading from another paper*) : Women workers, unanimous for the change. Unskilled labourers unanimous. Foundry, no vote—further information wanted.

JEREMY : Sitting on the fence (*signing MARTIN to be seated*). It is sufficiently clear, from the reports that have reached us, that the workers may be educated into the new conditions. There will be troubles, of course, but the argument of wages will, I believe, carry the day. I will also, at this point, declare myself. I am in favour of your enterprise, Martin.

MARTIN : A little while ago, sir, I should have expressed myself—gratified—honoured—by your approval.

JEREMY : There are one or two flies in the ointment ? True ! Let us see how we stand, now . . . Constance is cut out of my will ; Martin for that reason has tendered his resignation ; Constance bids me not accept it, and gives up Martin on condition that I do not . . . I have advanced things a stage by approving of Martin's plans. I should like a decisive answer from Martin ; nothing about a little while ago, but now—now !

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MARTIN : My answer, sir, is the same.

JEREMY : Do you put a personal matter above this public work we are to believe you think so important ? Take time, Martin. I on the one hand, and Constance on the other—remember we are father and daughter, and of much the same quality—are putting *you* to the test to destruction. Private or public—one or the other !

CONSTANCE : Look at me, Martin ; and recalling what I have told you—

MARTIN : Forgive me, Constance—my work ! (*he drops his face into his hands.* CONSTANCE *goes to him, pats him gently on the shoulder, and returns to her seat.*)

JEREMY : Martin capitulates, Constance approves : the public has it ! I thank you both. I can find no flaw in the metal . . . I will come back to you presently ; I have first to deal with these others. Are you sufficiently composed now, Margaret, to say a word or two to me ?

MARGARET : So that was the reason . . . your distance from me . . . your many acts of dislike and cruelty . . .

JEREMY : Did I do fairly by you ? Did I leave you my name, and make over to you on your marriage the best part of what I then possessed—did I ?

MARGARET : What was it worth, if now—

JEREMY : Ha ! Not much beside a million ?

GILES : Mr. Murdock ! If you cannot see that there may be feelings—outraged feelings—apart from all considerations of money—

JEREMY : Are there such feelings ?

GILES : Since you can ask such a question—

JEREMY : There are none in me ? Then let me stick to money ! For the reversion of my property, Margaret, you might be disposed to forgive me ?

MARGARET : We must not judge . . .

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JEREMY : But we have been all along judging Martin, and judgment has been passed on Constance. I am to be judged a despicable old party, I believe. We cannot leave you out ?

MARGARET : What am I to say ? (*between hope and fear*).

JEREMY : Something to be said, surely. No, Giles (*as he makes a movement to speak*), I want to hear Margaret.

MARGARET : Of course I forgive you—

JEREMY : Why of course ?

MARGARET : Anyhow, I wish to—

JEREMY : The forgiving mood ? Very good—go on.

MARGARET : It's difficult to forgive the way you're tormenting me. And how can I know you *are* to be forgiven—till you have said—

JEREMY : Till I have said— ?

GILES : Mr. Murdock ! (*breaking out in protest*).

JEREMY : But this is the point, Giles. What I am to say depends upon Margaret. I am waiting for one word ; I hope she may say it.

MARGARET : Father !

JEREMY : No, that is not the word (*shaking his head*). Try again.

MARGARET : I don't know what you want. What am I to do ? (*almost hysterical*).

GILES (*rising*) : Come away, my dear.

JEREMY : Will you open the door, Martin ? (*he does not move*).

MARGARET : I won't go. I know what will happen. Constance—

JEREMY : That was the word, Margaret.

MARGARET : Constance ? (*in a half shriek*).

JEREMY : I thought you might have put in a little plea for her ; that I should return to her something out of the million she has forgone. You have not done so.

CONSTANCE : Please don't bring me into this.

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JEREMY : Alas, my dear, you have put yourself out of it. And so, I'm afraid, has Margaret.

MARGARET : Am I always to have Constance in my way ?—my birthright taken from me—my inheritance—

GILES (*putting himself before her*) : I think you might have refrained from all this cruelty, Mr. Murdock. I at least very strongly condemn your treatment of Constance. And still more of my wife, especially after the intimate wrong you did long ago, and have chosen at this time to reveal. Margaret is moved by the thought of her children—hers and mine, Mr. Murdock !—by whom we hope one day to be honoured, as yours may never honour you. Now come away, Margaret (*lifting her and taking her arm—pausing as there comes a third knock at the door*).

JEREMY : May I beg you still to wait a minute ? Take the report, Martin, and we will finish as soon as we can.

MARTIN (*as GILES sits with a gesture of concession*) : This is the final return. Not to go into further detail, the percentage of all that have voted is eighty three for, and seventeen against. There is another note that further information is required (*he sits*).

JEREMY : Very rightly. I have been trying to let in light all round. By the way, a little more light in the physical sense— ? (*MARTIN rises again, switches on light, and resumes his seat*). Thank you. I have expressed myself in favour of taking up Martin's projects, but I have no illusions in the matter. As business, it is my last gamble. And I attach more than a little weight to the view put forward by Giles yesterday. Yes, Giles, your remarks might almost have been my own. We may be giving the death blow to values that have served us for a thousand years.

MARTIN : Surely, sir, that men should be well fed, well clothed, and housed, and kept actively at work—

JEREMY : These are good things, but they are not everything. If men should come to lose their finer qualities, they may be nothing. But who can foresee the future ? If the theory is economically unsound, we shall lose our money, and no other harm will be done. If it is sound, others will adopt it—other nations certainly, if not

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England. Pursue your age to the end ; the gods will make their own ironic commentary. You, Martin, as a man of your time, accept the responsibility.

MARTIN : I do.

JEREMY : Very well ; you shall have your way.

MARTIN (*with emotion*) : Thank you.

JEREMY : But don't think I shall make my money over to you ! You will have me at your side, and before you and behind you. I am Jeremy Murdock, and I am the Master.

MARTIN : You will return, sir, to active participation ?

JEREMY : I shall. I shall drive you along the path you have chosen, for my own profit and power. Do you accept that ?

MARTIN : I ask nothing better.

JEREMY : You mean as to the business, of course.

MARTIN : I was speaking of the business.

JEREMY : Well, still speaking of the business—you told me yesterday that you would need a mind wholly devoted to it. I shall need such a mind too. I cannot see that either of us can do his best if remaining unhappy about Constance. You will agree with me ?

MARTIN (*agitated*) : Yes . . .

JEREMY : You have said, Constance, that I have lived too long. I have lived to give you to a better man than Charles. I will have no forced devotion, with the tombstone that turns on me your door of release ! Marry and be damned to you, God bless you . . .

[MARTIN rises, looks at CONSTANCE ; at a smile from her sits down again. MARGARET's hands are clenched.]

CONSTANCE : Go on, father : I knew, of course, it would come to this.

JEREMY : And do you know the rest ? (*gripping the arms of his chair*). Do you think I am, as Margaret said, weakening ?

CONSTANCE : Do you believe that I am ?

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JEREMY : Listen, Martin ! Will you take Constance, in full knowledge that, irrevocably, I shall leave her nothing ?

MARTIN (*writhing in his chair*) : We have only come back, sir, to where we were. I confess that springing towards the realisation of all my dreams I was taking something for granted. I imagined that in giving me Constance—

JEREMY : Dreams and imagination !

MARTIN : I want no money with Constance ; but to deprive her—

JEREMY : She is deprived.

MARTIN (*crying out*) : Constance ! I have done you this injury—

JEREMY : And now you will do her the added injury of deserting her ? Because she is penniless ?

MARTIN : No ! A thousand times, no !

JEREMY : Then look her in the face, and say, Will you be my wife !

CONSTANCE : Don't be rushed, Martin. You are still free, so am I. Only my father is bound.

JEREMY : I am bound ? (*turning to her*).

CONSTANCE : Fast bound. You are Jeremy Murdock, and you are the Master.

JEREMY : Subtlety ! I can smash the lot of you.

CONSTANCE : You cannot. You can only leave us to go on without you ; yours is not the only capital in England. Martin can pick it up in the street—the words are yours. You will go out—idle, alone—for a few years yet. The world is wide (*signifying, Go*).

JEREMY : My true and gentle daughter ! Well, why shall I not do this ?

CONSTANCE : Because—you can't help keeping your finger in the pie.

JEREMY : And when the pie was opened . . . Wait ! We are keeping Giles and Margaret. In the matter of Margaret's

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holding in the old firm, Martin : what do you estimate the value at, today, of a hundred pound share ?

MARTIN : If the stock were in the market—the old conditions continuing ?

JEREMY : Yes.

MARTIN : At sixty-five or seventy.

JEREMY : Would you accept that as your own return on re-construction ?

MARTIN : Yes.

JEREMY : I shall take you at your word. Not in cash ; shares in the new concern.

MARTIN : Obviously. I wish to stake my all.

JEREMY : But must we do the equally obvious thing in the case of Margaret ?

MARTIN : I should say no, Mr. Murdock. For one thing, Mrs. Norgate may not wish to come in.

JEREMY : Do you, Margaret ?

MARGARET (*miserably*) : I don't know.

JEREMY : Let us hear Giles.

GILES : I shall advise my wife to hold on to her interest.

JEREMY : It shall remain open, then. In any case I shall bring the sum up to that of her dower, out of my own pocket. No conventional thanks, Giles ! (*stopping him*)—there is something much more important to follow. It concerns you all. A new will has to be made. Understand that I am inflexible : that I have foreseen this from the very beginning. A door was left open for Constance, but she has chosen to shut it. Not one of you is to benefit under my will—not one, I say.

MARGARET : Not one . . . (*sinking back, while GILES looks on the ground*).

JEREMY : I have to speak now specially to you, Martin. You have stressed the social aspects of business very heavily. I may agree or not agree. Poverty has its evils, but so has prosperity. I know no other reason for poverty than human inadequacy, and

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that inadequacy is likely to be just as strongly marked, if in other directions, with money superimposed. Still, we will give the workers the benefit of the doubt.

MARTIN : The labourer is worthy of his hire.

JEREMY : I'm glad you put it so, for you will be head labourer ; and as you get profitable work out of the rest, I shall get it out of you. If the profits are high, your hire will be proportionate ; but all those profits—I say all, not the half that you laid down yesterday—all over and above my personal needs will go back into the business, the whole concern to be disposed of eventually as I shall see fit. Is that clearly understood ?

MARTIN : Quite understood. I regard the enterprise as a trust.

JEREMY : Good. I shall so regard it. You have spoken continually of the public interest. Well, I shall hold every pound during my lifetime. It will be your fate, should your anticipations of great profit be realised, to see me accumulating money which neither you, nor any other private person, will ever touch. No detail yet—you are to accept only in principle.

MARTIN : Speaking for myself, I do.

JEREMY : Very good. Then this brings us to the conclusion I have been working up to. I shall leave my estate to the Nation, the profits that would have been mine going to reduction of the National Debt. Speak, please (*peremptorily*), every one of you.

MARTIN : Again speaking for myself, I assent. I will be satisfied with the purchase price of my nucleus, a large salary and my small share. Provided, sir, that after your death, as before it, administration be vested in my hands. I do not part with control—to you, or to the nation.

JEREMY : Agreed. We are making, I think, considerable business for the legal profession ! Giles and Margaret ?

GILES : I have nothing to say.

MARGARET (*broken*) : The children . . .

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JEREMY: And why should your children inherit, or other's children, to be parasites on the community? Let them work—draw their wages! It is the eternal privilege, of which I will not deprive them.

CONSTANCE (*quietly*): Jeremy.

JEREMY: What now? (*turning sharply to her*).

CONSTANCE: What was it you called yourself as to Charles, Margaret's brother?

JEREMY: A murderer.

CONSTANCE: You will do no murder here. Let Margaret go, with the assurance that she and her children will be provided for in a manner commensurate with her wrongs.

JEREMY: Upon my word—(*rising*).

CONSTANCE: Enough lives have hung upon your word. There is another's word to this.

JEREMY: Whose?

CONSTANCE: Mine (*rising with finality*).

JEREMY: By what right!

CONSTANCE: By right of your own blood and character, fulfilled in me.

JEREMY: You think I am finished?

CONSTANCE (*smiling*): No. It will take me all my time to manage you.

JEREMY: Ho! Has it come to that?

CONSTANCE: It came to that some time ago.

JEREMY: Jollying the old machinery? (*The factory whistle blows; he stops, waiting for the sound to cease*). The day's work . . . done . . . knock off! . . . Give me my hat and coat! (*MARTIN obeys, and helps him on*). I'm going to sit in the yard, where the scrap-iron is. And if you think I'm going to move an inch—(*he walks out*).

CURTAIN.

